THE NATURE OF A CRIME

CONRAD AND FORD (HUEFFER)

THREE PLAYS

JOSEPH CONRAD

THE NATURE OF A CRIME

—

LAUGHING ANNE

—

ONE DAY MORE

—

THE SECRET AGENT

BOOKS BY JOSEPH CONRAD

ALMAYER'S FOLLY
AN OUTCAST OF THE ISLANDS
THE NIGGER OF THE "NARCISSUS"
TALES OF UNREST
LORD JIM: A ROMANCE
YOUTH: A NARRATIVE
TYPHOON
FALK, AND OTHER STORIES
NOSTROMO: A TALE OF THE SEABOARD
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A SET OF SIX
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TALES OF HEARSAY
LAUGHING ANNE AND ONE DAY MORE (Two Plays)
SUSPENSE

With Ford Madox Ford (Hueffer)

ROMANCE: A NOVEL
THE INHERITORS: AN EXTRAVAGANT STORY
THE NATURE OF A CRIME

THE NATURE OF A CRIME

By

JOSEPH CONRAD AND

FORD MADOX FORD

(F. M. HUEFFER)

LAUGHING ANNE

ONE DAY MORE

(TWO PLAYS)

With an Introduction to "Laughing Anne" by John Galsworthy

THE SECRET AGENT

(DRAMA IN FOUR ACTS)

By JOSEPH CONRAD

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PREFACES

I

For years my consciousness of this small piece of collaboration has been very vague, almost impalpable, like fleeting visits from a ghost. If I ever thought of it, and I must confess that I can hardly remember ever doing it on purpose till it was brought definitely to my notice by my Collaborator, I always regarded it as something in the nature of a fragment. I was surprised and even shocked to discover that it was rounded. But I need not have been. Rounded as it is in form, using the word form in its simplest sense—printed form—it remains yet a fragment from its very nature and also from necessity. It could never have become anything else. And even as a fragment it is but a fragment of something else that might have been—of a mere intention.

But, as it stands, what impresses me most is the amount this fragment contains of the crudely materialistic atmosphere of the time of its origin, the time when the *English Review* was founded. It emerges from the depths of a past as distant from us now as the square-skirted, long frock-coats in which unscrupulous, cultivated, high-minded *jouisseurs* like ours here attended to their strange business activities and cultivated the little blue flower of sentiment. No doubt our man was conceived for purposes of irony; but our conception of him, I fear, is too fantastic.

Yet the most fantastic thing of all, it seems to me, is that we two who had so often discussed soberly the limits and methods of literary composition should have believed for a moment that a piece of work in the nature of an analytical confession (produced *in articulo mortis* as it were) could have been developed and achieved in collaboration!

What optimism! But it did not last long. I seem to remember a moment when I burst into earnest entreaties that all these people should be thrown overboard without more ado. This, I believe, *is* the real nature of the crime. Overboard. The neatness and dispatch with which it is done in Chapter VIII was wholly the act of my Collaborator's good nature in the face of my panic.

After signing these few prefatory words I will pass the pen to him in the hope that he may be moved to contradict me on every point of fact, impression, and appreciation. I said "the hope." Yes, eager hope. For it would be delightful to catch the echo of the desperate, earnest and funny quarrels which enlivened those old days. The pity of it is that there comes a time when all the fun of one's life must be looked for in the past.

J. C.

II

No, I find nothing to contradict, for, the existence of this story having been recalled to my mind by a friend, the details of its birth and its attendant circumstances remain for me completely forgotten, a dark, blind-spot on the brain. I cannot remember the houses in which the writing took place, the view from the windows, the pen, the table cloth. At a given point

in my life I forgot, literally, all the books I had ever written; but, if nowadays I re-read one of them, though I possess next to none and have re-read few, nearly all the phrases come back startlingly to my memory and I see glimpses of Kent, of Sussex, of Carcassonne—of New York, even; and fragments of furniture, mirrors, who knows what? So that, if I didn't happen to retain, almost by a miracle, for me, of retention, the marked up copy of "Romance" from which was made the analysis lately published in a certain periodical, I am certain that I could have identified the phrases exactly as they there stand. Looking at the book now I can hear our voices as we read one passage or another aloud for purposes of correction. Moreover I could say: This passage was written in Kent and hammered over in Sussex; this, written in Sussex and worked on in Kent; or this again was written in the downstairs café and hammered in the sitting room on the first floor, of an hotel that faces the sea on the Belgian coast.

But of "The Nature of a Crime" no phrase at all suggests either the tones of a voice or the colour of a day. When an old friend, last year, on a Parisian Boulevard said: "Isn't there a story by yourself and Collaborator buried in the So & So?" I repudiated the idea with a great deal of heat. Eventually I had to admit the, as it were, dead fact. And, having admitted that to myself, and my Collaborator having corroborated it, I was at once possessed by a sort of morbid craving to get the story re-published in a definitive and acknowledged form. One may care infinitely little for the fate of one's work and yet be almost hypochondriacally anxious as to the form its publication shall take—if the publication is likely to occur posthumously. I became at once dreadfully afraid that some philologist of that Posterity for which one writes, might,

in the course of his hyena occupations, disinter these poor bones and, attributing sentence one to writer A and sentence two to B, maul at least one of our memories. With the nature of *those* crimes one is only too well acquainted. Besides, though one may never read comments one desires to get them over. It is indeed agreeable to hear a storm rage in the distance and rumble eventually away.

Let me, however, since my Collaborator wishes it and in the name of Fun that is to-day hardly an echo, differ from him for a shade as to the nature of those passages of time. I protest against the word: quarrels. There were not any. And I should like to make the note that our collaboration was almost purely oral. We wrote and read aloud the one to the other. Possibly in the end we even wrote *to* read aloud the one to the other: for it strikes me very forcibly that "The Nature of a Crime" is for the most part prose meant for recitation, or of that type.

Anyhow, as the memory comes back to me overwhelmingly, I would read on and read on. One begins with a fine propulsion. Sometimes that would last to the end. But, as often as not, by a real telepathy, with my eyes on the page and my voice going on I would grow aware of an exaggerated stillness on the part of my Collaborator in the shadows. It was an extraordinary kind of stillness: not of death: not of an ice age. Yes, it was the stillness of a prisoner on the rack determined to conceal an agony. I would read on, my voice gradually sticking to my jaws. When it became unbearable I would glance up. On the other side of the hearth I would have a glimpse of a terribly sick man, of a convulsed face, of fingers contorted. Guido Fawkes beneath the *peine forte et dure* looked like that. You are to remember that we were very

serious about writing. I would read on. After a long time it would come: "Oh! . . . Oh, oh! . . . Oh my God. . . . My dear Ford. . . . My dear faller. . . ." (That in those days was the fashionable pronunciation of "fellow".)

For myself, I would listen always with admiration. Always with an admiration that I have never since recaptured. And if there were admirablenesses that did not seem to me to fit in with the given scene I could at least, at the end of the reading, say with perfect sincerity: "Wonderful! *How* you do things! . . ." before beginning on: "But don't you perhaps think. . . ."

And I really do not believe that either my Collaborator or myself ever made an objection which was not jointly sustained. That is not quarrels. When I last looked through the bound proofs of *Romance* I was struck with the fact that whereas my Collaborator eliminated almost every word of action and eighty per-cent of the conversations by myself, I supplied almost all the descriptive passages of the really collaborated parts—and such softer sentiment as was called for. And my Collaborator let them get through.

All this took place long ago; most of it in another century during another reign; whilst an earlier but not less haughty and proud generation were passing away.

F. M. F.

THE NATURE OF A CRIME

THE NATURE OF A CRIME

I

You are, I suppose, by now in Rome. It is very curious how present to me are both Rome and yourself. There is a certain hill—you, and that is the curious part of it, will never go there—yet, yesterday, late in the evening, I stood upon its summit and you came walking from a place below. It is always midday there: the seven pillars of the Forum stand on high, their capitals linked together, and form one angle of a square. At their bases there lie some detritus, a broken marble lion, and I think but I am not certain, the bronze she-wolf suckling the two bronze children. Your dress brushed the herbs: it was grey and tenuous: I suppose you do not know how you look when you are unconscious of being looked at? But I looked at you for a long time—at my You.

I saw your husband yesterday at the club and he said that you would not be returning till the end of April. When I got back to my chambers I found a certain letter. I will tell you about it afterwards—but I forbid you to look at the end of what I am writing now. There is a piece of news coming: I would break it to you if I could—but there is no way of breaking the utterly unexpected. Only, if you read this through you will gather from the tenor, from the tone of my thoughts, a little inkling, a small preparation for my disclosure. Yes: it is a "disclosure."

. . . Briefly, then, it was this letter—a business letter—that set me thinking: that made that hill rise before me. Yes, I stood upon it and there before me lay Rome—beneath a haze, in the immense sea of plains. I have often thought of going to Rome—of going with you, in a leisurely autumn of your life and mine. Now—since I have received that letter—I know that I shall never see any other Rome than that from an imagined hilltop. And when, in the wonderful light and shadelessness of that noon, last evening, you came from a grove of silver poplars, I looked at you—*my* you—for a very long while. You had, I think, a parasol behind your head, you moved slowly, you looked up at the capitals of those seven pillars . . . And I thought that I should never—since you will not return before the end of April—never see you again. I shall never see again the you that every other man sees . . .

You understand everything so well that already you must understand the nature of my disclosure. It is, of course, no disclosure to tell you that I love you. A very great reverence is due to youth—and a very great latitude is due to the dead. For I am dead: I have only lived through you for how many years now! And I shall never speak with you again. Some sort of burial will have been given to me before the end of April. I am a spirit. I have ended my relations with the world. I have balanced all my books, my will is made. Only I have nothing to leave—save to you, to whom I leave all that is now mine in the world—my memory.

It is very curious—the world now. I walked slowly down here from Gordon Square. I walked slowly—for all my work is done. On the way I met Graydon Bankes, the K. C. It would have astonished him if he could have known how unreal he looked to me. He is six feet high, and upon his left cheek there is a brown

mole. I found it difficult to imagine why he existed. And all sorts of mists hurried past him. It was just outside the Natural History Museum. He said that his Seaford Railway Bill would come before Committee in June. And I wondered: what is June? . . . I laughed and thought: why June will never come!

June will never come. Imagine that for a moment. We have discussed the ethics of suicide. You see why June will never come!

You remember that ring I always wear? The one with a bulging, greenish stone. Once or twice you have asked me what stone it was. You thought, I know, that it was in bad taste and I told you I wore it for the sake of associations. I know you thought—but no: there has never been any woman but you.

You must have felt a long time ago that there was not, that there could not have been another woman. The associations of the ring are not with the past of a finished affection, or hate, or passion, with all these forms of unrest that have a term in life: they looked forward to where there is no end—whether there is rest in it God alone knows. If it were not bad taste to use big words in extremities I would say there was Eternity in the ring—Eternity which is the negation of all that life may contain of losses and disappointments. Perhaps you have noticed that there was one note in our confidence that never responded to your touch. It was that note of universal negation contained within the glass film of the ring. It is not you who brought the ring into my life: I had it made years ago. It was in my nature always to anticipate a touch on my shoulder, to which the only answer could be an act of defiance. And the ring is my weapon. I shall raise it to my teeth, bite through the glass: inside there is poison.

I haven't concealed anything from you. Have I?

And, with the great wisdom for which I love you, you have tolerated these other things. You would have tolerated this too, you who have met so many sinners and have never sinned . . .

Ah, my dear one—that is why I have so loved you. From our two poles we have met upon one common ground of scepticism—so that I am not certain whether it was you or I who first said: "Believe nothing: be harsh to no one." But at least we have suffered. One does not drag around with one such a cannon-ball as I have done all these years without thinking some wise thoughts. And well I know that in your dreary and terrible life you have gained your great wisdom. You have been envied; you too have thought: Is any prospect fair to those among its trees? And I have been envied for my gifts, for my talents, for my wealth, for my official position, for the letters after my name, for my great and empty house, for my taste in pictures—for my . . . for my opportunities.

Great criminals and the very patient learn one common lesson: Believe in nothing, be harsh to no one!

But you cannot understand how immensely leisurely I feel. It is one o'clock at night. I cannot possibly be arrested before eleven to-morrow morning. I have ten hours in which, without the shadow of a doubt, I can write to you: I can put down my thoughts desultorily and lazily. I have half a score of hours in which to speak to you.

The stress of every secret emotion makes for sincerity in the end. Silence is like a dam. When the flood is at its highest the dam gives way. I am not conceited enough to think that I can sweep you along, terrified, in the rush of my confidences. I have not the elemental force. Perhaps it is just that form of "greatness" that I have lacked all my life—that profound quality

which the Italians call *terribilità*. There is nothing overpowering or terrible in the confusion of a love too great to be kept within the bounds of the banality which is the safeguard of our daily life. Men have been nerved to crime for the sake of a love that was theirs. The call of every great passion is to unlawfulness. But your love was not mine, and my love for you was vitiated by that conventional reverence which, as to nine parts in ten, is genuine, but as to the last tenth a solemn sham behind which hide all the timidities of a humanity no longer in its youth. I have been of my time—altogether of my time—lacking courage for a swoop, as a bird respects a ragged and nerveless scarecrow. Altogether a man of my time. Observe, I do not say "our time." You are of all time—you are the loved Woman of the first cry that broke the silence and of the last song that shall mark the end of this ingenious world to which love and suffering have been given, but which has in the course of ages invented for itself all the virtues and all the crimes. And being of this world and of my time I have set myself to deal ingeniously with my suffering and my love.

Now everything is over—even regrets. Nothing remains of finite things but a few days of life and my confession to make to you—to you alone of all the world.

It is difficult. How am I to begin? Would you believe it—every time I left your presence it was with the desire, with the necessity to forget you. Would you believe it?

This is the great secret—the heart of my confession. The distance did not count. No walls could make me safe. No solitude could defend me; and having no faith in the consolations of eternity I suffered too cruelly from your absence.

If there had been kingdoms to conquer, a crusade to

preach—but no. I should not have had the courage to go beyond the sound of your voice. You might have called to me any time! You never did. Never. And now it is too late. Moreover, I am a man of my time, the time is not of great deeds but of colossal speculations. The moments when I was not with you had to be got through somehow. I dared not face them empty-handed lest from sheer distress I should go mad and begin to execrate you. Action? What form of action could remove me far enough from you whose every thought was referred to your existence? And as you were to me a soul of truth and serenity I tried to forget you in lies and excitement. My only refuge from the tyranny of my desire was in abasement. Perhaps I was mad. I gambled. I gambled first with my own money and then with money that was not mine. You know my connection with the great Burden fortune. I was trustee under my friend's, Alexander Burden's will. I gambled with a determined recklessness, with closed eyes. You understand now the origin of my houses, of my collections, of my reputation, of my taste for magnificence—which you deigned sometimes to mock indulgently with an exquisite flattery as at something not quite worthy of me. It was like a break-neck ride on a wild horse, and now the fall has come. It was sudden. I am alive but my back is broken. Edward Burden is going to be married. I must pay back what I have borrowed from the Trust. I cannot. Therefore I am dead. (A mouse has just come out from beneath one of the deed-boxes. It looks up at me. It may have been eating some of the papers in the large cupboard. To-morrow morning I shall tell Saunders to get a cat. I have never seen a mouse here before. I have never been here so late before. At times of pressure, as you know, I have always taken my

papers home. So that these late hours have been, as it were, the prerogative of the mouse. No. I shall not get a cat. To that extent I am still a part of the world: I am master of the fate of mice!) I have, then, ten hours, less the time it has taken me to chronicle the mouse, in which to talk to you. It is strange, when I look back on it, that in all the years we have known each other—seven years, three months and two days—I have never had so long as ten hours in which I might talk to you. The longest time was when we came back from Paris together, when your husband was in such a state that he could neither see nor hear. (I've seen him, by-the-bye, every day since you have been gone. He's really keeping away from it wonderfully well: in fact, I should say that he has not once actually succumbed. I fancy, really, that your absence is good for him in a way: it creates a new set of circumstances, and a change is said to be an excellent aid in the breaking of a habit. He has, I mean, to occupy himself with some of the things, innumerable as they are, that you do for him. I find that he has even had his passbook from the bank and has compared it with his counterfoils. I haven't, on account of this improvement, yet been round to his chemist's. But I shall certainly tell them that they *must* surreptitiously decrease the strength of it.) That was the longest time we have ever really talked together. And, when I think that in all these years I haven't once so much as held your hand for a moment longer than the strictest of etiquette demanded! And I loved you within the first month.

I wonder why that is. Fancy, perhaps. Habit perhaps—a kind of idealism, a kind of delicacy, a fastidiousness. As you know very well it is not on account of any moral scruples. . . .

I break off to look through what I have already writ-

ten to you. There is, first, the question of why I never told you my secret: then, the question of what my secret really is; I have started so many questions and have not followed one of them out to the very end. But all questions resolve themselves into the one question of our dear and inestimable relationship.

I think it has been one of the great charms of our relationship that all our talks have been just talks. We have discussed everything under the sun, but we have never discussed anything *au fond.* We have strayed into all sorts of byways and have never got anywhere. I try to remember how many evenings in the last five years we have not spent together. I think they must be less than a hundred in number. You know how, occasionally, your husband would wake out of his stupors—or walk *in* his stupor and deliver one of his astonishingly brilliant disquisitions. But remember how, always, whether he talked of free love or the improvement in the breed of carriage-horses, he always thrashed his subject out to the bitter end. It was not living with a man: it was assisting at a performance. And, when he was sunk into his drugs or when he was merely literary, or when he was away, how lazily we talked. I think no two minds were ever so fitted one into another as yours and mine. It is not of course that we agree on all subjects—or perhaps upon any. In the whole matter of conduct we are so absolutely different—you are always for circumspection, for a careful preparation of the ground, for patience; and I am always ready to act, and afterwards draw the moral from my own actions. But somehow, in the end, it has all worked out in our being in perfect agreement. Later I will tell you why that is.

Let me return to my mouse. For you will observe

that the whole question revolves, really, around that little allegorical mite. It is an omen: it is a symbol. It is a little herald of the Providence that I do not believe in—of the Providence you so implicitly seek to obey. For instinctively you believe in Providence—in God, if you will. I as instinctively disbelieve. Intellectually of course you disbelieve in a God. You say that it is impossible for Reason to accept an Overlord; I that Reason forces one to accept an Overlord; that Reason forces one to believe in an Omnipotent Ruler—only I am unable to believe. We, my dear, are in ourselves evidence of a design in creation. For we are the last word of creation. It has taken all the efforts, all the birthpangs of all the ages to evolve—you and me. And, being evolved, we are intellectually so perfectly and so divinely fashioned to dovetail together. And, physically too, are we not divinely meant the one for the other? Do we not react to the same causes: should not we survive the same hardships or succumb to the same stresses? Since you have been away I have gone looking for people—men, women, children, even animals —that could hold my attention for a minute. There has not been one. And what purer evidence of design could you ask for than that?

I have made this pact with the Providence that I argue for, with the Providence in whose existence I cannot believe—that if, from under the castle of black metal boxes, the mouse reappear and challenge death—then there is no future state. And, since I can find no expression save in you, if we are not reunited I shall no longer exist. So my mouse is the sign, the arbitrament, a symbol of an eternal life or the herald of nothingness.

I will make to you the confession that since this fancy, this profound truth, has entered my mind, I have not raised my eyes from the paper. I dread—I sup-

pose it is dread—to look across the ring of light that my lamp casts. But now I will do so. I will let my eyes travel across the bundles of dusty papers on my desk. Do you know I have left them just as they were on the day when you came to ask me to take your railway tickets? I will let my eyes travel across that rampart of blue and white dockets. . . . The mouse is not there.

But that is not an end of it. I am not a man to be ungenerous in my dealings with the Omnipotent: I snatch no verdict.

II

Last night it was very late and I grew tired, so I broke off my letter. Perhaps I was really afraid of seeing that mouse again. Those minute superstitions are curious things. I noticed, when I looked at the enumeration of these pages to-night, I began to write upon the thirteenth sheet—and that gives me a vague dissatisfaction. I read, by-the-bye, a paragraph in a newspaper: it dealt with half-mad authors. One of these, the writer said, was Zola; he was stated to be half mad because he added together the numbers on the backs of cabs passing him in the street. Personally, I do that again and again—and I know very well that I do it in order to dull my mind. It is a sort of narcotic. Johnson, we know, touched his street-posts in a certain order: that, too, was to escape from miserable thoughts. And we all know how, as children, we have obeyed mysterious promptings to step upon the lines between the paving-stones in the street. . . . But the children have their futures: it is well that they should propitiate the mysterious Omnipotent One. In their day, too, Johnson and Zola had their futures. It was well that Johnson should "touch" against the evil chance; that Zola should rest his mind against new problems. In me it is mere imbecility. For I have no future.

Do you find it difficult to believe that? You know the Burdens, of course. But I think you do not know that, for the last nine years, I have administered the Burden estates all by myself. The original trustees

were old Lady Burden and I; but nine years ago Lady Burden gave me a power of attorney and since then I have acted alone. It was just before then that I had bought the houses in Gordon Square—the one I live in, the one you live in, and the seven others. Well, rightly speaking, those houses have been bought with Burden money, and all my pictures, all my prints, all my books, my furniture, my reputation as a connoisseur, my governorship of the two charities—all the me that people envy—have been bought with the Burden money. I assure you that at times I have found it a pleasurable excitement. . . . You see, I have wanted you sometimes so terribly—so terribly that the juggling with the Burden accounts has been as engrossing a narcotic as to Zola was the adding up of the numbers upon the backs of cabs. Mere ordinary work would never have held my thoughts.

Under old Burden's will young Edward Burden comes of age when he reaches the age of twenty-five or when he marries with my consent. Well, he will reach the age of twenty-five and he will marry on April 5. On that day the solicitors of his future wife will make their scrutiny of my accounts. It is regarded, you understand, as a mere formality. But it amuses me to think of the faces of Coke and Coke when they come to certain figures! It was an outlaw of some sort, was it not, who danced and sang beneath the gallows? I wonder, now, what sort of traitor, outlaw, or stealthy politician I should have made in the Middle Ages. It is certain that, save for this one particular of property, I should be in very truth illustrious. No doubt the state shall come at last in which there shall no more be any property. I was born before my time.

For it is certain that I am illustrious save in that one respect. To-day young Edward Burden came here to

the office to introduce me to his *fiancée*. You observe that I have robbed her. The Burden property is really crippled. They came, this bright young couple, to get a cheque from me with which to purchase a motor-car. They are to try several cars in the next three weeks. On the day before the wedding they are to choose one that will suit them best—and on the wedding-day in the evening they are to start for Italy. They will be coming towards you. . . . Then no doubt, too, a telegram will reach them, to say that in all probability motor-cars will be things not for them for several years to come. What a crumbling of their lives!

It was odd how I felt towards *her*. You know his pompous, high forehead, the shine all over him, the grave, weighty manner. He held his hat—a wonderful shiny, "good" hat—before his mouth, for all the world as if he had been in church. He made, even, a speech in introducing Miss Averies to me. You see, in a sense, he was in a temple. My office enshrined a deity, a divinity: the law, property, the rights of man as maintained by an august constitution. I am for him such a wonderfully "safe" man. My dear one, you cannot imagine how I feel towards him: a little like a deity, a little like an avenging Providence. I imagine that the real Deity must feel towards some of His worshippers much as I feel towards this phœnix of the divines.

The Deity is after all the supreme Artist—and the supreme quality of Art is surprise.

Imagine then the feeling of the Deity towards some of those who most confidently enter His temple. Just imagine His attitude towards those who deal in the obvious platitudes that "honesty is the best policy," or "genius the capacity for taking pains." So for days the world appears to them. Then suddenly: honesty no longer pays; the creature, amassing with his infinite

pains, data for his Great Work, is discovered to have produced a work of an Infinite Dulness. That is the all-suffering Deity manifesting Himself to His worshippers. For assuredly a day comes when two added to two no longer results in four. That day will come on April 5 for Edward Burden.

After all he has done nothing to make two and two become four. He has not even checked his accounts: well: for some years now I have been doing as much as that. But with his *fiancée* it is different. She is a fair, slight girl with eyes that dilate under all sorts of emotion. In my office she appears not a confident worshipper but a rather frightened fawn led before an Anthropomorphic Deity. And, strangely enough, though young Burden who trusts me inspires me with a sardonic dislike, I felt myself saying to this poor little thing that faced me: "Why: I have wronged you!" And I regretted it.

She, you see, has after all given something towards a right to enjoy the Burden estates and the Burden wealth; she has given her fragile beauty, her amiability, her worship, no doubt, of the intolerable Edward. And all this payment in the proper coin: so she has in a sense a right. . . .

Good-night, dear one, I think you have it in your power—you *might* have it in your power—to atone to this little creature. To-morrow I will tell you why and how.

III

I WROTE last night that you have something in your power. If you wished it you could make me live on. I am confident that you will not wish it: for you will understand that capriciously or intolerably I am tired of living this life. I desire you so terribly that now, even the excitement of fooling Burden no longer hypnotizes me into an acceptance of life without you. Frankly, I am tired out. If I had to go on living any longer I should have to ask you to be mine in one form or other. With that and with my ability—for of course I have great ability—I could go on fooling Burden for ever. I could restore: I could make sounder than ever it was that preposterous "going concern" the Burden Estate. Unless I like to let them, I think that the wife's solicitors will not discover what I have done. For, frankly, I have put myself out in this matter in order to be amusing to myself and ingenious. I have forged whole builders' estimates for repairs that were never executed: I have invented whole hosts of defaulting tenants. It has not been latterly for money that I have done this: it has been simply for the sheer amusement of looking at Edward Burden and saying to myself:

"Ah: you trust me, my sleek friend. Well. . . ."

But indeed I fancy that I am rich enough to be able to restore to them all that I have taken. And, looking at Edward Burden's little *fiancée*, I was almost tempted to set upon that weary course of juggling. But I am at the end of my tether. I cannot live without you

longer. And I do not wish to ask you. Later I will tell you Or No—I will tell you now.

You see, my dear thing, it is a question of going one better. It would be easy enough to deceive your husband: it would be easier still to go away together. I think that neither you nor I have ever had any conscientious scruples. But, analysing the matter down to its very depths, I think we arrive at this, that without the motives for self-restraint that other people have we are anxious to show more self-restraint than they. We are doing certain work not for payment but for sheer love of work. Do I make myself clear? For myself I have a great pride in your image. I can say to myself: "Here is a woman, my complement. She has no respect for the law. She does not value what a respect for the law would bring her. Yet she remains purer than the purest of the makers of law." And I think it is the converse of that feeling that you have for me.

If you desire me to live on, I will live on: I am so swayed by you that if you desire me to break away from this ideal of you, the breath of a command will send me round to your side.

I am ready to give my life for this Ideal: nay more, I am ready to sacrifice you to it, since I know that life for you will remain a very bitter thing. I know, a little, what renunciation means.

And I am asking you to bear it—for the sake of my ideal of you. For, assuredly, unless I can have you I must die—and I know that you will not ask me to have you. And I love you: and bless you for it.

IV

I HAVE just come in from *Tristan and Isolde.*

I had to hurry and be there for the first notes because you—my you—would, I felt, be sitting beside me as you have so often. That, of course, is passion—the passion that makes us unaccountable in our actions.

I found you naturally: but I found, too, something else. It has always a little puzzled me why we return to Tristan. There are passages in that thing as intolerable as anything in any of the Germanic master's scores. But we are held—simply by the idea of the love-philtre: it's that alone that interests us. We do not care about the initial amenities of Tristan and the prima donna: we do not believe in Mark's psychologising: but, from the moment when those two dismal marionettes have drained unconsideringly the impossible cup, they become suddenly alive, and we see two human beings under the grip of a passion—acting as irrationally as I did when I promised my cabman five shillings to get me to the theatre in time for the opening bars.

It is, you see, the love-philtre that performs this miracle. It interests—it is real to us—because every human being knows what it is to act, irrationally, under the stress of some passion or other. We are drawn along irresistibly: we commit the predestined follies or the predestined heroisms: the other side of our being acts in contravention of all our rules of conduct or of intellect. Here, in Tristan, we see such madness justified with a concrete substance, a herb, a root. We see

a vision of a state of mind in which morality no longer exists: we are given a respite, a rest: an interval in which no standard of conduct oppresses us. It is an idea of an appeal more universal than any other in which the tired imagination of humanity takes refuge.

The thought that somewhere in the world there should be something that I could give to you, or you to me, that would leave us free to do what we wish without the drag of the thought of what we owe, to each other, to the world! And after all, what greater gift could one give to another? It would be the essential freedom. For assuredly, the philtre could do no more than put it in a man's power to do what he would do if he were let loose. He would not bring out more than he had in him: but he would fully and finally express himself.

Something unexpected has changed the current of my thoughts. Nothing can change their complexion, which is governed not by what others do but by the action which I must face presently. And I don't know why I should use the word unexpected, unless because at the moment I was very far from expecting that sort of perplexity. The correct thing to say would be that something natural has happened.

Perfectly natural. Asceticism is the last thing that one could expect from the Burdens. Alexander Burden, the father, was an exuberant millionaire, in no vulgar way, of course; he was exuberant with restraint, not for show, with a magnificence which was for private satisfaction mainly. I am talking here of the ascetic temperament which is based on renunciation, not of mere simplicity of tastes, which is simply scorn for certain orders of sensations. There have been millionaires who have lived simply. There have been millionaires who have lived sordidly—but miserliness is one of the supreme forms of sensualism.

Poor Burden had a magnificent physique. The reserved abilities of generations of impoverished Burdens, starved for want of opportunities, matured in his immense success—and all their starved appetites too. But all the reserve quality of obscure Burdens has been exhausted in him. There was nothing to come to his son—who at most could have been a great match and is to-day looked upon in that light, I suppose, by the relations of his future wife. I don't know in what light that young man looks upon himself. His time of trial is coming.

Yesterday at eight in the evening he came to see me. I thought at first he wanted some money urgently. But very soon I reflected that he need not have looked so embarrassed in that case. And presently I discovered that it was not money that he was in need of. He looked as though he had come, with that characteristic gravity of his—so unlike his father—to seek absolution at my hands. But that intention he judged more decorous, I suppose, to present to me as a case of conscience.

Of course it was the case of a girl—not his *fiancée*. At first I thought he was in an ugly scrape. Nothing of the kind. The excellent creature who had accepted his protection for some two years past—how dull they must have seemed to her—was perhaps for that reason perfectly resigned to forego that advantage. At the same time, she was not too proud to accept a certain provision, compensation—whatever you like to call it. I had never heard of anything so proper in my life. He need not have explained the matter to me at all. But evidently he had made up his mind to indulge in the luxury of a conscience.

To indulge that sort of conscience leads one almost as far as indulged passion, only, I cannot help thinking,

on a more sordid road. A luxury snatched from the fire is in a way purified, but to find this one he had gone apparently to the bottom of his heart. I don't charge him with a particularly odious degree of corruption, but I perceived clearly that what he wanted really was to project the sinful effect of that irregular connection—let us call it—into his regulated, reformed, I may say lawfully blessed state—for the sake of retrospective enjoyment, I suppose. This rather subtle, if unholy, appetite, he was pleased to call the voice of his conscience. I listened to his dialectic exercises till the great word that was sure to come out sooner or later was pronounced.

"It seems," he said, with every appearance of distress, "that from a strictly moral point of view I ought to make a clean breast of it to Annie."

I listened to him—and, by Heaven, listening to him I *do* feel like the God-head of whom I have already written to you. You know, positively he said that at the very moment of his "fall" he had thought of what *I* should think of him. And I said:

"My good Edward, you are the most debauched person I have ever met."

His face fell, his soft lips dropped right down into a horseshoe. He had come to me as one of those bland optimists *would* go to his deity. He expected to be able to say: "I have sinned," and to be able to hear the Deity say: "That's all right, your very frank confession does you infinite credit." His deity was, in fact, to find him some way out of his moral hole. I was to find him some genial excuse; to make him feel good in his excellent digestion once more. That was, absolutely, his point of view, for at my brutal pronouncement he stuttered:

"But—but surely . . . the faults of youth . . . and surely there are plenty of others? . . ."

I shook my head at him and panic was dropping out of his eyes: "Can't I marry Annie honourably?" he quavered. I took a sinister delight in turning the knife inside him. I was going to let him go anyhow: the sort of cat that I am always lets its mice go. (That mouse, by-the-bye, has never again put in an appearance.)

"My dear fellow," I said, "does not your delicacy let you see the hole you put me into? It's to my interest that you should not marry Miss Averies and you ask me to advise you on the point."

His mouth dropped open: positively he had never considered that when he married I lost the confounded three hundred a year for administering the Burden Trust. I sat and smiled at him to give him plenty of time to let his mind agonize over his position.

"Oh, hang it," he said. . . . And his silly eyes rolled round my room looking for that Providence that he felt ought to intervene in his behalf. When they rested on me again I said:

"There, go away. Of course it's a fault of your youth. Of course every man that's fit to call himself a man has seduced a clergyman's daughter."

He said:

"Oh, but there was not anything common about it."

"No," I answered, "you had an uncommonly good time of it with your moral scruples. I envy you the capacity. You'll have a duller one with Miss Averies, you know."

That was too much for him to take in, so he smoothed his hat.

"When you said I was . . . debauched . . . you were only laughing at me. That was hardly fair. I'm tremendously in earnest."

"You're only play-acting compared with me," I answered. He had the air of buttoning his coat after

putting a cheque into his breast pocket. He had got, you see, the cheque he expected: my applause of his successful seduction, my envy of his good fortune. That was what he had come for—and he got it. He went away with it pretty bare-facedly, but he stopped at the threshold to let drop:

"Of course if I had known you would be offended by my having recourse to Annie's solicitors for the settlement . . ."

I told him I was laughing at him about that too.

"It was the correct thing to do, you know," were the words he shut the door upon. The ass . . .

The phrase of his—that he had thought of me at the moment of his fall—gives you at once the measure of his respect for me. But it gave me much more. It gave me my cue: it put it into my head to say he was debauched. And, indeed, that is debauchery. For it is the introduction of one's morals into the management of one's appetites that makes an indulgence of them debauchery. Had my friend Edward regarded his seduction as the thing he so much desired me to tell him it was; a thing of youth, high spirits—a thing we all do—had he so regarded it I could not really have called it debauchery. But—and this is the profound truth—the measure of debauchery is the amount of joy we get from the indulgence of our appetites. And the measure of joy we get is the amount of excitement: if it brings into play not only all our physical but all our moral nature then we have the crucial point beyond which no man can go. It isn't, in fact, the professional seducer, the artist in seduction that gets pleasure from the pursuit of his avocation, any more than it is the professional musician who gets thrills from the performance of music. You cannot figure to yourself the violinist, as he fiddles the most complicated passage of

a concerto, when he really surmounts the difficulty by dint of using all his knowledge and all his skill—you cannot imagine him thinking of his adviser, his mother, his God and all the other things that my young friend says he thought about. And it is the same with the professional seducer. He may do all that he knows to bring his object about—but that is not debauchery. It is, by comparison, a joyless occupation: it is drinking when you are thirsty. Putting it in terms of the most threadbare allegory—you cannot imagine that Adam got out of the fall the pleasure that Edward Burden got out of his bite of the apple.

But Edward Burden, whilst he shilly-shallied with "Shall I?" and "Sha'n't I?" could deliciously introduce into the matter *all* his human relationships. He could think of me, of his mother, of the fact that potentially he was casting to the winds the very cause for his existence. For assuredly, if Edward Burden have a cause for existence it is that he should not, morally or physically, do anything that would unfit him to make a good marriage. So he had, along with what physical pleasure there might be, the immense excitement of staking his all along with the tremendous elation of the debate within himself that went before. For he was actually staking his all upon the chance that he could both take what he desired and afterwards reconcile it with his conscience to make a good match. Well, he has staked and won. That is the true debauchery. That, in a sense, is the compensating joy that Puritanism gets.

V

I HAVE just come in. Again you will not guess from where. From choosing a motor-car with Burden and his *fiancée*. It seems incredible that I should be called upon to preside at these preparations for my own execution. I looked at hundreds of these shiny engines, with the monstrously inflated white wheels, and gave a half-amused—but I can assure you a half-interested—attention to my own case. For one of these will one day—and soon now—be arrested in a long rush, by my extinction. In it there will be seated the two young people who went with me through the garages. They will sit in some sort of cushioned ease—the cushions will be green, or red, or blue in shiny leather. I think, however, that they will not be green—because Miss Averies let slip to me, in a little flutter of shy confidence, the words: "Oh, don't let's have green, because it's an unlucky colour." Edward Burden, of course, suppressed her with a hurried whisper as if, in thus giving herself away to me, she must be committing a sin against the house of Burden.

That, naturally, is the Burden tradition: a Burden's wife must possess frailties: but she must feign perfection even to a trusted adviser of the family. She must not confess to superstitions. It was amusing, the small incident, because it was the very first attempt that little Miss Averies has ever made to get near me. God knows what Edward may have made me appear to her: but I fancy that, whatever Edward may have said, she had pierced through that particular veil: she

realizes, with her intuition, that I am dangerous. She is alarmed and possibly fascinated because she feels that I am not "straight"—that I might, in fact, be a woman or a poet. Burden, of course, has never got beyond seeing that I dress better than he does and choose a dinner better than his uncle Darlington.

I came, of course, out of the motor-car ordeal with flying colours—on these lines. I lived, in fact, up to my character for being orthodox in the matter of comfort. I even suggested two little mirrors, like those which were so comforting to us all when we sat in hansom cabs. That struck Burden as being the height of ingenuity—and I know it proved to Miss Averies, most finally, that I am dangerous, since no woman ever looks in those little mirrors without some small motive of coquetry. It was just after that that she said to me:

"Don't you think that the little measures on the tops of the new canisters are extravagant for China tea?"

That, of course, admitted me to the peculiar intimacy that women allow to other women, or to poets, or to dangerous men. Edward, I know, dislikes the drinking of China tea because it is against the principle of supporting the British flag. But Miss Averies in her unequal battle with this youth of the classical features slightly vulgarized, called me in to show a sign of sympathy—to give at least the flicker of the other side—of the woman, the poet, or the pessimist among men. She asked me, in fact, not to take up the cudgels to the extent of saying that China tea is the thing to drink—that would have been treason to Edward—but she desired that her instinct should be acknowledged to the extent of saying that the measures of canisters should be contrived to suit the one kind of tea as well as the other. In his blind sort of way Edward caught

the challenge in the remark and his straight brows lowered a very little.

"If you don't have more than three pounds of China tea in the house in a year it won't matter about the measures," he said. "We never use more at Shackleton."

"But it makes the tea too strong, Edward."

"Then you need not fill the measure," he answered.

"Oh, I wish," she said to me, "that you'd tell Edward not to make me make tea at all. I dread it. The servants do it so much better."

"So," I asked, "Edward has arranged everything down to the last detail?"

Edward looked to me for approval and applause.

"You see, Annie has had so little experience, and I've had to look after my mother's house for years." His air said: "Yes! You'll see our establishment will be run on the very best lines! Don't you admire the way I'm taming her already?"

I gave him, of course, a significant glance. Heaven knows why: for it is absolutely true that I am tired of appearing reliable—to Edward Burden or any one else in the world. What I want to do is simply to say to Edward Burden: "No, I don't at all admire your dragging down a little bundle of ideals and sentiments to your own fatted calf's level."

I suppose I have in me something of the poet. I can imagine that if I had to love or to marry this little Averies girl I should try to find out what was her tiny vanity and I should minister to it. In some way I should discover from her that she considered herself charming, or discreet, or tasteful, or frivolous, beyond all her fellows. And, having discovered it, I should bend all my energies to giving her opportunities for displaying her charm, her discreetness or her coquetry.

With a woman of larger and finer mould—with you!—I should no doubt bring into play my own idealism. I should invest her with the attributes that I consider the most desirable in the world. But in either case I cannot figure myself dragging her down to my own social or material necessities.

That is what Edward Burden is doing for little Miss Averies. I don't mean to say that he does not idealize her—but he sees her transfigured as the dispenser of his special brand of tea or the mother of the sort of child that he was. And that seems to me a very valid reason why women, if they were wise, should trust their fortunes cold-bloodedly and of set reason to the class of dangerous men that now allure them and that they flee from.

They flee from them, I am convinced, because they fear for their worldly material fortunes. They fear, that is to say, that the poet is not a stable man of business: they recognize that he is a gambler—and it seems to them that it is folly to trust to a gambler for life-long protection. In that they are perhaps right. But I think that no woman doubts her power to retain a man's affection—so that it is not to the reputation for matrimonial instability that the poet owes his disfavour. A woman lives, in short, to play with this particular fire, since to herself she says: "Here is a man who has broken the hearts of many women. I will essay the adventure of taming him." And, if she considers the adventure a dangerous one, that renders the contest only the more alluring, since at heart every woman, like every poet, is a gambler. In that perhaps she is right.

But it seems to me that women make a great mistake in the value of the stakes they are ready to pay in order to enter this game. They will stake, that is to say,

their relatively great coin—their sentimental lives; but they hoard with closed fingers the threepenny bit which is merely the material future.

They prefer, that is to say, to be rendered the mere presiding geniuses of well-loaded boards. It is better to be a lady—which you will remember philologically means a "loaf-cutter"—than to be an Ideal.

And in this they are obviously wrong. If a woman can achieve the obvious miracle of making a dangerous man stable in his affections she may well be confident that she can persuade him to turn his serious attention to the task of keeping a roof over her head. Certainly, I know, if I were a woman which of the two types of men I would choose. Upon the lowest basis it is better for all purposes of human contracts to be married to a good liar than to a bad one. For a lie is a figurative truth—and it is the poet who is the master of these illusions. Even in the matter of marital relations it is probable that the poet is as faithful as the Edward Burdens of this world—only the Edward Burdens are more skilful at concealing from the rest of the world their pleasant vices. I doubt whether they are as skilful at concealing them from the woman concerned—from the woman, with her intuition, her power to seize fine shades of coolness and her awakened self-interest. Imagine the wife of Edward Burden saying to him, "You have deceived me!" Imagine then the excellent youth, crimsoning, stuttering. He has been taught all his life that truth must prevail though the skies fall—and he stammers: "Yes: I have betrayed you." And that is tragedy, though in the psychological sense—and that is the important one—Edward Burden may have been as faithful as the ravens, who live for fifteen decades with the same mate. He will, in short, blunder into a tragic, false position. And he will make the

tragedy only the more tragic in that all the intellectual powers he may possess will be in the direction of perpetuating the dismal position. He will not be able to argue that he has not been unfaithful—but he will be able to find a hundred arguments for the miserable woman prolonging her life with him. Position, money, the interests of the children, the feelings of her family and of his—all these considerations will make him eloquent to urge her to prolong her misery. And probably she will prolong it.

This, of course, is due to the excellent Edward's lack of an instinctive sympathy. The poet, with a truer vision, will in the same case, be able to face his Miss Averies' saying: "You have deceived me!" with a different assurance. Supposing the deflection to have been of the momentary kind he will be able to deny with a good conscience since he will be aware of himself and his feelings. He will at least be able to put the case in its just light. Or, if the deflection be really temperamental, really permanent, he will be unable—it being his business to look at the deeper verities—to lie himself out of the matter. He will break, strictly and sharply. Or, if he do not, it may be taken as a sign that his Miss Averies is still of value to him—that she, in fact, is still the woman that it is his desire to have for his companion. This is true of course, only in the large sense, since obviously there are poets whose reverence for position, the interest of children or the feelings of their friends and relatives, may outweigh their hatred of a false position. These, however, are poets in the sense that they write verse: I am speaking of those who live the poet's life; to such, a false position is too intolerable to be long maintained.

But this again is only one of innumerable side-issues: let me return to my main contention that a dinner of

herbs with a dangerous man is better than having to consume the flesh of stalled oxen with Edward Burden. Perhaps that is only a way of saying that you would have done better to entrust yourself to me than to—— (But no, your husband is a better man than Edward Burden. He has at least had the courage to revert to his passion. I went this afternoon to your chemists and formally notified them that if they supplied him with more than the exactly prescribed quantity of that stuff, I, as holding your power of attorney, should do all that the law allows me to do against them.)

Even to the dullest of men, marrying is for the most part an imaginative act. I mean marrying as a step in life sanctioned by law, custom and that general consent of mankind which is the hall-mark of every irrational institution. By irrational I do not mean wrong or stupid. Marriage is august by the magnitude of the issues it involves, balancing peace and strife on the fine point of a natural impulse refined by the need of a tangible ideal. I am not speaking here of mere domestic peace or strife which for most people that count are a question of manners and a mode of life. And I am thinking of the peace mostly—the peace of the soul which yearns for some sort of certitude in this earth, the peace of the heart which yearns for conquest, the peace of the senses that dreads deception, the peace of the imaginative faculty which in its restless quest of a high place of rest is spurred on by these great desires and that great fear.

And even Edward Burden's imagination is moved by these very desires and that very fear—or else he would not have dreamt of marrying. I repeat, marriage is an imaginative institution. It's true that his imagination is a poor thing but it is genuine nevertheless. The faculty of which I speak is of one kind in all of us. Not

to every one is given that depth of feeling, that faculty of absolute trust which *will not* be deceived, and the exulting masterfulness of the senses which are the mark of a fearless lover. Fearless lovers are rare, if obstinate, and sensual fools are countless as grains of sand by the seashore. I can imagine that correct young man perfectly capable of setting himself deliberately to worry a distracted girl into surrender.

VI

I DON'T know why, to-night in particular, the fact that I am a dead man occurs to me very insistently. I had forgotten this for two whole days. If any one very dear to you has ever been *in extremis* at a distance and you have journeyed to be at the last bedside, you will know how possible this is—how for hours at a time the mind will go wandering away from the main fact that is drawing you onwards, till suddenly it comes back: some one is dying at a distance. And I suppose one's I is the nearest friend that one has—and my I is dying at a distance. At the end of a certain number of days is the deathbed towards which I am hurrying—it is a fact which I cannot grasp. But one aspect grows more clear to me every time I return to this subject.

You remember that, when we have discussed suicide, we have agreed that to the man of action death is a solution: to the man of thoughts it is none. For the man of action expresses himself in action, and death is the negation of action: the man of thought sees the world only in thoughts, and over thought death exercises no solution of continuity. If one dies one's actions cease, one's problem continues. For that reason it is only in so far as I am a man of action that I shall be dying. You understand what I mean—for I do not mean that it is my actions that have killed me. It is simply because I have taken refuge from my thoughts in action, and because after April 5 that refuge will be closed to me, that I take refuge in a final action which, properly speaking, is neither action nor refuge.

And perhaps I am no man of action at all, since the action in which I have taken refuge is properly speaking no action at all, but merely the expression of a frame of mind. I have gambled, that is to say I have not speculated. For the speculator acts for gain: the gambler in order to interest himself. I have gambled —to escape from you: I have tried to escape from my thoughts of you into divining the undivinable future. For that is what gambling is. You try for a rise: you try for a fall—and the rise or the fall may depend on the momentary madness of a dozen men who declare a war, or upon the rain from heaven which causes so many more stalks of wheat to arise upon so many million square inches of earth. The point is that you make yourself dependent upon caprice—upon the caprice of the weather or upon the movement in the minds of men more insane than yourself.

To-day I have entered upon what is the biggest gamble of my whole life. Certain men who believe in me—they are not Edward Burdens, nevertheless they believe in me—have proposed to me to form a corner in a certain article which is indispensable to the daily life of the City. I do not tell you what it is because you will assuredly witness the effects of this inspiration.

You will say that, when this is accomplished, it will be utterly uninteresting. And that is literally true: when it is done it will be uninteresting. But in the multiplicity of things that will have to be done before the whole thing is done—in the waiting for things to take effect, in the failures perhaps more than in the successes, since the failures will imply new devising—in all the meticulous thought-readings that will be necessary, the interest will lie, and in the men with whom one is brought into contact, the men with whom one struggles, the men whom one must bribe or trick.

And you will say: How can I who am to die in fourteen days embark upon an enterprise that will last many months or many years? That, I think, is very simple.

It is my protest against being called a man of action, the misconception that I have had to resent all my life. And this is a thought: not an action: a thought made up of an almost infinite number of erring calculations. You have probably forgotten that I have founded two towns, upon the south coast: originated four railways in tropical climates and one in the west of England: and opened up heaven knows how many mines of one kind or another—and upon my soul I had forgotten these things too until I began to cast about in my mind. And now I go to my deat hunmindful of these glories in so far as they are concrete. In that sense my death is utter: it is a solution. But, in so far as they are my refuges from you they remain problems to which, if my ghost is to escape you, I must return again and again.

In dying I surrender to you and thus, for the inner self of myself, death is no ending but the commencement of who knows what tortures. It is only in the latent hope that death is the negative of consciousness that I shall take my life. For death, though it can very certainly end no problem, may at least make us unconscious of how, eventually, the problem solves itself. That, you see, is really the crux of the whole thing—that is why the man of action will take refuge in death: the man of thought, never. But I, I am the man of neither the one nor the other: I am the man of love, which partakes of action and of thought, but which is neither.

The lover is, perhaps, the eternal doubter—simply because there is no certain panacea for love. Travel may

cure it—but travel may cause to arise homesickness, which of all forms of love is the most terrible. To mix with many other men may cure it—but again, to the man who really loves, it may be a cause for still more terrible unrest, since seeing other men and women may set one always comparing the beloved object with the same thing. And, indeed, the form that it takes with me—for with me love takes the form of a desire to discuss—the form which it takes with me renders each thing that I see, each man with whom I speak, the more torturing, since always I desire to adjust my thoughts of them by your thoughts. I went down the other day—before I had begun to write these letters to you and before I knew death impended so nearly over me—to the sea at P—. I was trying to get rid of you. I sat in the moonlight and saw the smacks come home, visible for a minute in the track of the moon and then no more than their lights in the darkness. The fishermen talked of death by drowning mostly: the passage of the boats across that trail of light suggested reflections, no doubt trite. But, without you to set my thoughts by, I could get no more forward: I went round and round in a ring from the corpses fished up in the nets to the track of the moon. And since walking up and down on the parade brought me no nearer to you, I did not even care to move: I neither meditated nor walked, neither thought nor acted. And that is real torture.

It was the next morning that I heard that young Burden desired that his *fiancée's* solicitors should scrutinize the accounts of the Burden Trust—and Death loomed up before me.

You will ask: why Death? Why not some alternative? Flight or prison? Well: prison would be an unendurable travelling through Time; flight, an equally unendurable travelling through Time with Space added.

Both these things are familiar: Death alone, in spite of all the experience that humanity has had of Death, is the utterly unfamiliar. For a gambler it is a *coup* alluring beyond belief—as we know neither what we stake nor what we stand to win. I, personally, stand to win a great deal, since Life holds nothing for me and I stake only my life—and what I seek is only forgetfulness of you, or some sort of eventual and incomprehensible union with you. For the union with you that I seek is a queer sort of thing; hardly at all, I think, a union of the body, but a sort of consciousness of our thoughts proceeding onwards together. That we may find in the unending Afterwards. Or we may find the Herb Oblivion.

Either of these things I desire. For, in so far as we can dogmatize about Death we may lay it down that Death is the negation of Action but is powerless against Thought. I do not desire Action: and at the same time I do not fear Thought. For it is not my thoughts of you that I fear: left alone with them I can say: "What is she more than any other material object?" It is my feelings that wear out my brain—my feelings that make me know that you are more than every material object living or still, and more than every faith dead or surviving. For feeling is neither Thought nor Action: it is the very stuff of Life itself. And, if Death be the negation of Life it may well be the end of consciousness.

The worst that Death can do to me is to deliver me up for ever to unsatisfied longings for you. Well, that is all that Life has done, that is all that Life can do, for me.

But Life can do so much more that is worse. Believe me when I say that I dread imprisonment—and believe me when I say that I do not dread disgrace. For you

know very well that it is true when I say that I positively chuckle at the thought of the shock my fall would give to all these unawakened intelligences of this world. You know how I despise Edward Burden for trusting in me; you know how I have always despised other people who trusted in established reputations. I don't mean to say that I should not have liked to keep the game up, certainly I should, since in gambling it is more desirable to win than to lose. And it is more amusing to fool fools than to give them eye-openers. But I think that, in gambling, it is only a shade less desirable, *per se*, to lose than to win. The main point is the sensation of either; and the only valid objection to losing is that, if one loses too often one has at last no longer the wherewithal to gamble. Similarly, to give people eye-openers is, *per se*, nearly as desirable as to fool them. It is not quite so desirable, since the game itself is the fooling. But the great objection in *my* case is that the eye-opener would once and for all put an end to the chance of my ever fooling them again. That, however, is a very small matter and what I dread is not that. If people no longer trusted in me I could no doubt still find an outlet for my energies with those who sought to take advantage of my abilities, trusting to themselves to wrest from me a sufficient share of the plunder that they so ardently desire, that I so really have no use for.

No, I seek in Death a refuge from exposure not because exposure would cripple my energies: it would probably help them: and not because exposure would mean disgrace; I should probably find ironical satisfaction in it—but simply because it would mean imprisonment. That I dread beyond belief: I clench my fingers when, in conversation, I hear the words: "A long sentence." For that would mean my being delivered up for a long time—for ever—to you. I write

"for ever" advisedly and after reflection, since a long subjection, without relief, to that strain would leave upon my brain a wound that must prove ineffaceable. For to be alone and to think—those are my terrors.

One reads that men who have been condemned for long years to solitary imprisonment go mad. But I think that even that sad gift from Omnipotent Fate would not be mine. As I figure the world to myself, Fate is terrible only to those who surrender to her. If I surrendered, to the extent of living to go to prison, then assuredly the future must be uniformly heavy, uniformly doomed, in my eyes. For I would as soon be mad as anything else I can think of. But I should not go mad. Men go mad because of the opportunities they miss: because the world changes outside their prison walls, or because their children starve. But I have no opportunities to miss or take: the changes of the world to me are nothing, and there is no soul between home and starvation I could stand.

Whilst I am about making this final disposition of my properties—let me tell you finally what I have done in regard to your husband himself. It is a fact—and this I have been keeping up my sleeve as a final surprise for you—that he is almost cured. . . .

But I have just received an incomprehensible note from Edward Burden. He asks me for some particulars as to his confounded estate and whether I can lend him some thousands of pounds at short notice. Heaven knows what new scrape this is that he's in. Of course this may precipitate my crash. But whatever happens, I shall find time to write my final words to you—and nothing else really matters. . .

VII

I HAVEN'T yet discovered what Edward Burden is doing. I have found him a good round sum upon mortgage—the irony of the position being that the money is actually his whilst the mortgage does not actually exist. He says that what he is doing with the money will please me. I suppose that means that he's embarking upon some sort of speculation which he imagines that I would favour. It is odd that he should think that I find gratification in his imitating myself.

But why should I concern myself with this thing at all? Nothing in the world can ever please or displease me any more. For I have taken my resolve: this is my last night upon earth. When I lay down this pen again, I shall never take up any pen more. For I have said all that I can say to you. I am utterly tired out. To-night I shall make up into a parcel all these letters—I must sit through the night because it is only to-morrow morning that I shall be able to register the parcel to you—and registering it will be my last act upon the habitable globe. For biting through the glass in the ring will be not an action, but the commencement of a new train of thought. Or perhaps only my final action will come to an end when you read these words in Rome. Or will that be only thought—the part of me that lives—pleading to you to give your thoughts for company. I feel too tired to think the matter out!

Let me, then, finish with this earth: I told you, when I finished writing last night, that Robert is almost cured. I would not have told you this for the sake of

abrogating to myself the position of a saviour. But I imagine that you would like the cure to go on, and in the case of some accident after my death, it might go all to pieces once more. Quite simply then: I have been doing two things. In the first place I have persuaded your chemists to reduce very gradually the strength of chloral, so that the bottles contain nearly half water. And Robert perceives no difference. Now of course it is very important that he shall not know of the trick that is being so beneficently played on him—so that, in case he should go away or for one reason or another change his chemists, it must be carefully seen to that instead of pure chloral he obtains the exactly diluted mixture. In this way he may be brought gradually to drinking almost pure water.

But that alone would hardly be satisfactory: a comparatively involuntary cure is of little value in comparison with an effort of the will. You may, conceivably, expel nature with a fork, but nothing but a passion will expel a passion. The only point to be proved is whether there exists in your husband any other passion for the sake of which he might abandon his passion for the clearness of vision which he always says his chloral gives him. He has not, of course, the incentives usual to men: you cannot, in fact, "get" him along ordinary lines. . . . But apart from his physical craving for the drug he *has* that passion for clearness of intellect that he says the drug gives him—and it is through that, that at last, I have managed to hit his pride.

For I have put it to him very strongly that one view of life is just as good as another—no better, no worse, but just the same. And I have put it to him that his use of chloral simply limits for him the number of views of life that he might conceivably have. And, when

you come to think of all the rhapsodies of his that we have listened to, I think that that piece of special pleading is sufficiently justified. I do indeed honestly believe that, for what it is worth, he is on the road to salvation. He means to make a struggle—to attempt the great feat of once more seeing life with the eyes that Fate originally gave to him.

This is my legacy to *you:* if you ask me why I have presented you with this man's new identity—since it *will* mean a new identity—I must answer that I simply don't know. Why have we kept him alive all these years? I have done it no doubt because I had nothing to give you. But you? If you have loved me you must have wished him—I won't say dead—but no more there. Yet you have tried too—and I suppose this answer to the riddle is simply the answer to the whole riddle of our life. We have tried to play a supremely difficult game simply because it sanctified our love. For, after all, sanctification arises from difficulties. Well, we have made our way very strait and we have so narrowed the door of entrance that it has vanished altogether. We have never had *any* hope of a solution that could have satisfied us. If we had cared to break the rules of the game, I suppose we could have done it easily enough—and we could have done it the more easily since neither you nor I ever subscribed to those rules. If we have not it was, I think, simply because we sought the difficulty which sanctifies. . . . Has it been a very imbecile proceeding? I am most uncertain. For it is not a thing to be very proud of—to be able to say that for a whole lifetime, one has abstained from that which one most desired. On the other hand, we have won a curious and difficult game. Well—there it is—and there is your legacy. I do not think that there is

anything else for me to write about. You will see that, in my will, I have left everything I possess to—Edward Burden. This is not because I wish to make him reparation, and it's not because I wish to avoid scandal: it is simply because it may show him—one very simple thing. It will show him how very nearly I might have made things come right. I have been balancing my accounts very carefully, and I find that, reckoning things reasonably against myself, Edward Burden will have a five-pound note with which to buy himself a mourning-ring.

The being forced to attend to my accounts will make him gasp a good deal. It will certainly shake his belief in all accepted reputations—for he will look on the faces of many men each "as solid as the Bank of England," and he will think: "I wonder if you are like ——?" His whole world will crumble—not because I have been dishonest, since he is coldblooded enough to believe that all men may be dishonest. But he will tremble because I have been able to be so wildly dishonest and yet to be so successfully respectable. He won't even dare to "expose" me, since, if he did that, half of the shares which he will inherit from me would suffer an eclipse of disreputability, would tumble to nothingness in value—and would damage his poor pocket. He will have to have my estate set down at a high figure; he will have to be congratulated on his fortunate inheritance, and he will have, sedulously, to compound my felony.

You will wonder how I can be capable of this final cruelty—the most cruel thing that, perhaps, ever one man did to another. I will tell you why it is: it is because I hate all the Edward Burdens of the world—because, being the eternal Haves of the world, they have made their idiotic rules of the game. And you and I

suffer; you and I, the eternal Have Nots. And we suffer, not because their rules bind us, but because, being the finer spirits, we are forced to set ourselves rules that are still more strict in order that, in all things, we may be the truly gallant.

But why do I write: "You will wonder how I can be capable of this." You will have understood—you who understand everything.

Eight in the morning.—Well: now we part. I am going to register the parcel containing all these letters to you. We part: and it is as if you were dropping back—the lost Eurydice of the world—into an utter blackness. For, in a minute, you will be no more than part of my past. Well then: good-night.

VIII

You will have got the telegram I sent you long before you got the parcel of letters; you will have got the note I wrote you by the same post as the letters themselves. If I have taken these three days to myself before again writing to you it has been because I have needed to recover my power of thinking. Now, in a way, I have recovered it—and it is only fair to say that I have devoted all my thoughts to how the new situation affects you—and you in your relations to me.

It places me in your hands—let that be written first and foremost. You have to decree my life or my death. For I take it that now we can never get back again into our old position: I have spoken, you have heard me speak. The singular unity, the silence of our old life is done with for good. There is perhaps no reason why this should not be so: silence is no necessary part of our relationship. But it has seemed to make a rather exquisite bond between us.

It must, if I am to continue to live—it must be replaced by some other bond. In our silence we have seemed to speak in all sorts of strange ways: we have perhaps read each other's thoughts. I have seen words form themselves upon your lips. But now you must —there is no way out of it—you *must* write to me. You must write to me fully: all your thoughts. You must, as I have done, find the means of speech—or I can no longer live. . . .

I am reprieved!

I don't know if, in my note to you, I explained exactly

what had happened. It was in this way. I was anxious to be done with my world very early and, as soon as eight o'clock struck, I set out for the post-office at the corner to register that parcel of letters for you. Till the task was accomplished—the last I was to perform on earth—I noticed nothing: I was simply in a hurry. But, having given the little fagot into the hands of a sleepy girl, I said to myself suddenly: "Now I *am* dead!" I began suddenly as they say of young children, to "notice." A weight that I had never felt before seemed to fall away from me. I noticed, precisely, that the girl clerk was sleepy, that, as she reached up one hand to take the parcel over the brass caging, she placed the other over her mouth to hide a yawn.

And out on the pavement it was most curious what had befallen the world. It had lost all interest: but it had become fascinating, vivid. I had not, you see, any senses left, but my eyesight and hearing. Vivid: that is the word. I watched a newsboy throw his papers down an area, and it appeared wonderfully interesting to discover that *that* was how one's papers got into the house. I watched a milkman go up some doorsteps to put a can of milk beside a boot-scraper and I was wonderfully interested to see a black cat follow him. They were the clearest moments I have ever spent upon the earth—those when I was dead. They were so clear because nothing else weighed on my attention but just those little things. It was an extraordinary, a luxuriant feeling. That, I imagine, must have been how Adam and Eve felt before they had eaten of the fruit of knowledge.

Supposing I had tacitly arranged with myself that I would die in the street, I think I should still have walked home simply to dally longer with that delightful

feeling of sheer curiosity. For it was sheer curiosity to see how this world, which I had never looked at, really performed before utterly unbiassed eyes.

That was why, when I got home, I sent away the messenger that brought to me Edward Burden's letter; there was to be no answer. Whatever Burden's query might be I was not going to commit myself to any other act. My last was that of sending off the parcel to you.

My opening Burden's letter when the messenger had gone was simply a part of my general curiosity. I wanted to see how a Burden letter would look when it no longer had any bearings at all for me. It was as if I were going to read a letter from that dear Edward to a man I did not know upon a subject of which I had never heard.

And then I was reprieved!

The good Edward imagining that I was seriously hurt at his having proposed to allow his wife's solicitors to superintend my stewardship—the good Edward in his concern had positively insisted that all the deeds should be returned to me absolutely unchecked. He said that he had had a hard fight for it and that the few thousands he had borrowed from me had represented his settlement, which he had thus paid in specie. . . .

It chimed in wonderfully with his character, when I come to think of it. Of course he was disciplining Miss Averies' representatives just as he had disciplined herself in the matter of China tea of which I have written to you. And he had imagined that I was seriously hurt! Can you figure to yourself such an imbecile?

But, if you permit me to continue to live, you will be saving the poor fool from the great shock I had prepared for him—the avalanche of discovery, the

earthquake of uncertainty. For he says in that so kind way of his that, having thus shown his entire confidence in me—in the fact, that is, that Providence is on the side of all Burdens—he will choose a time in the future, convenient for me, when he will go thoroughly with me into his accounts. And inasmuch as his wedding-tour will take him all around the world I have at least a year in which to set things straight. And of course I can put off his scrutiny indefinitely or deceive him for ever.

I did not think all these things at once. In fact, when I had read his letter, so strong within me was the feeling that it was only a mental phenomenon, a thing that had no relation with me—the feeling of finality was so strong upon me that I actually found myself sitting in that chair before I realized what had occurred.

What had occurred was that I had become utterly and for good your property.

In that sense only am I reprieved. As far as Edward Burden is concerned I am entirely saved. I stand before you and ask you to turn your thumb up or down. For, having spoken as I have to you, I have given you a right over me. Now that the pressing necessity for my death is over I have to ask you whether I shall plunge into new adventures that will lead me to death or whether I am to find some medium in which we may lead a life of our own, in some way together. I was about to take my life to avoid prison: now prison is no more a part of my scheme of existence. But I must now have some means of working towards you or I must run some new and wild risk to push you out of my thoughts. I don't, as you know, ask you to be my secret mistress, I don't ask you to elope with me. But I say that you *must* belong to me as much in thought

as I have, in this parcel of letters, been revealed and given over to you. Otherwise, I must once more gamble—and having tasted of gambling in the shadow of death, I must gamble for ever in that way. I must, I mean, feel that I am coming towards you or committing crimes that I may forget you.

My dear, I am a very tired man. If you knew what it was to long for you as I have longed for you all these years, you would wonder that I did not, sitting in that chair, put the ring up to my teeth, in spite of Burden's letter, and end it. I have an irresistible longing for rest—or perhaps it is only your support. To think that I must face for ever—or for as long as it lasts—this troublesome excitement of avoiding thoughts of you—that was almost unbearable. I resisted because I had written these letters to you. I love you and I know you love me—yet without them I would have inflicted upon you the wound of my death. Having written them I cannot face the cruelty to you. I mean that, if I had died without your knowing why, it would have been only a death grievous to you—still it is the duty of humanity and of you with humanity to bear and to forget deaths. But now that you must know, I could not face the cruelty of filling you with the pain of unmerited remorse. For I know that you would have felt remorse, and it would have been unmerited since I gave you no chance or any time to stretch out your hands to me. Now I give it you and wait for your verdict.

For the definite alternatives are these: I will put Burden's estate absolutely clear within the year and work out, in order to make safe money, the new and comparatively sober scheme of which I have written to you: that I will do if you will consent to be mine to the extent of sharing our thoughts alone. Or, if you

will not, I will continue to gamble more wildly than ever with the Burden money. And that in the end means death and a refuge from you.

So then, I stand reprieved—and the final verdict is in your hands.

APPENDIX

A Note on "Romance"

Writing to his Collaborator in a letter published in the *Transatlantic Review* for January, 1924, Mr. Conrad makes the following ascription of passages in the work above named:

> First Part, yours; Second Part, mainly yours, with a little by me on points of seamanship and suchlike small matters; Third Part, about 60 per cent. mine with important touches by you; Fourth Part, mine with here and there an important sentence by you; Fifth Part practically all yours, including the famous sentence at which we both exclaimed: "This is Genius," (Do you remember what it is?) with perhaps half a dozen lines by me. . . .

Mr. Conrad's recollections—except for the generosity of his two "importants"—tally well enough with those of his Collaborator if conception alone is concerned. When it comes however to the writing the truth is that Parts One, Two, Three and Five are a singular mosaic of passages written alternately by one or other of the collaborators. The matchless Fourth Part is both in conception and writing entirely the work of Mr. Conrad.

Below will be found the analysis of "Romance." Any student of literature with an ear for prose will hardly need these underlinings, for Mr. Conrad's definitenesses of statement stand out amongst his Collaborator's more English keyings down so that when one of his half sentences bursts into the no doubt suaver prose of the other it is as if the page comes to life and speaks.

Every collaboration is a contest of temperaments if it be at all thoroughly carried out; and this collaboration was carried out so thoroughly that, even when the book came to the proof stage, the original publishers, half way through the printing, sent the MS. back to the authors. They were still making innumerable corrections.

Originally conceived, in the attempt to convey realistically a real story of adventure recorded in a State Trial, as the thin tale of a very old man—and this before the question of collaboration arose—the book contains of its first version only the two opening sentences—and the single other sentence: "And, looking back, we see Romance!" In between lay to say the least of it almost unbelievable labours—a contest of attrition lasting over several years. For in so far as this collaboration was a contest of wills it was a very friendly one; yet it was the continual attempt on the part of the one collaborator to key up and of the other to key down. And so exhausting was the contest that in the course of the years two definite breakdowns occurred. In the first the robuster writer let the book called "The Inheritors" just go and it remains a monument as it were of silverpoint, delicacies and allusiveness. The second breakdown is recorded in the Fourth Part of "Romance," sketches for which were written over and over—and then over—again, until the weaker brother, in absolute exhaustion, in turn let it go at that. So, to mark those, breaking points, you have the silverpoint of "The Inheritors" set against the, let us say, oil-painting of this matchless Fourth Part.

"The Nature of a Crime" should have become a novel treating of the eternal subject of the undetected criminal—a theme which every writer for once or twice in his life at least contemplates in a world in which the fortunate are so very often the merely not found out. The courage of few writers carries them even beyond the contemplation; in this case the joint courages of the authors went as far as what you may read.

The passage from the Fifth Part of "Romance" printed below contains the "famous sentence" as to which Mr. Conrad writes: "We both exclaimed: 'This is genius.'"

Joseph Conrad in Roman type; F. M. Hueffer in Italics.

Part One: Chapter One.

To yesterday and to-day I say my polite "vaya usted con dios." What are these days to me? But that far-off day of

my romance, when from between *the blue and white bales in Don Ramon's darkened storeroom, at Kingston,* I saw the door open before the figure of *an old man with the tired, long, white face,* that day I am not likely to forget. I remember *the chilly smell of the typical West Indian store,* the indescribable *smell of damp bloom, of locos, of pimento, of olive oil, of new sugar, of new rum; the glassy double sheen of Ramon's great spectacles, the piercing eyes in the mahogany face,* while the tap, tap, tap of a cane on the flags went on behind the inner door; *the click of the latch; the stream of light.* The door, petulantly thrust inwards, struck against some barrels. I remember the rattling of the bolts on that door, and *the tall figure* that appeared there, *snuff-box in hand. In that land of white clothes that precise, ancient, Castilian in black was something to remember. The black cane that had made the tap, tap, tap dangled by a silken cord from the hand whose delicate blue-veined, wrinkled wrist ran back into a foam of lawn ruffles.* The other hand paused in the act of conveying a pinch of snuff to the nostrils of the *hooked nose that had, on the skin stretched tight over the bridge, the polish of old ivory; the elbow pressing the black cocked hat against the side; the legs, one bent, the other bowing a little back*—this was the attitude of Seraphina's father.

Having imperiously thrust the door of the inner room open, he remained immovable, with no intention of entering, and called in a harsh, aged voice: "Señor Ramon! Señor Ramon!" and then twice: "Seraphina—Seraphina!" turning his head back.

Then for the first time I saw Seraphina, looking over her father's shoulder. I remember her face of that day; *her eyes were grey—the grey of black, not of blue. For a moment they looked me straight in the face, reflectively, unconcerned, and then travelled to the spectacles of old Ramon.*

This glance—remember I was young on that day—had been enough to set me wondering what they were thinking of me; what they could have seen of me.

"But there he is your Señor Ramon," she said to her father, *as if she were chiding him for a petulance in calling;* "your sight

is not very good, my poor little father—there he is, your Ramon."

The warm reflection of the light behind her, gilding the curve of her face from ear to chin, lost itself in the shadows of black lace falling from dark hair that was not quite black. She spoke as if the words clung to her lips; as if she had to put them forth delicately for fear of damaging the frail things.

Part One: Chapter Five.

Macdonald cleared his throat, with a sound resembling the coughing of a defective pump, and a mere trickle of a voice asked: "*Hwhat evidence have ye of identitee?*"

I hadn't any at all and began to finger my buttonholes as shame-faced as a pauper before a Board. The certitude dawned upon me suddenly that Carols, even if he would consent to swear to me, would prejudice my chances.

I cannot help thinking that *I came very near to being cast adrift upon the streets of Kingston. To my asseverations Macdonald returned nothing but a series of minute "humphs." I don't know what overcame his scruples; he had shown no signs of yielding, but suddenly turning on his heel* made a motion with one of his flabby white hands. I understood it to mean that I was to follow him aft.

The decks were covered with a jabbering turmoil of negroes with muscular arms and brawny shoulders. All their shining faces seemed to be momentarily gashed open to show rows of white, and were spotted with inlaid eyeballs. The sounds coming from them were a bewildering noise. They were hauling baggage about aimlessly. *A large soft bundle of bedding nearly took me off my legs.* There wasn't room for emotion. Macdonald laid about him with the handle of the umbrella a few inches from the deck; but the passage that he made for himself closed behind him.

Suddenly, in the pushing and hurrying, I came upon a little clear space beside a pile of boxes. Stooping over them was the angular figure of Nichols, the second mate. He looked up at me, screwing his yellow eyes together.

"*Going ashore,*" *he asked,* "*long of that Puffing Billy?*"

"What business is it of yours?" I mumbled sulkily.

Sudden and intense threatening came into his yellow *eyes.*

"*Don't you ever come to* you know where," *he said;* "*I don't want no spies on what I do. There's a man there'll crack your little backbone if he catches you. Don't yeh come now. Never.*"

Part Four: Chapter One.

In my anxiety to keep clear of the schooner which, for all I know to this day, may not have been there at all, I had come too close to the sand, so close that I heard soft, rapid footfalls stop short in the fog. A voice seemed to be asking me in a whisper:

"Where, oh, where?"

Another cried out irresistibly, "I see it."

It was a subdued cry, as if hushed in awe.

My arm swung to and fro; the turn of my wrist went on imparting the propelling motion of the oar. All the rest of my body was gripped helplessly in the dead expectation of the end, as if in the benumbing seconds of a fall from a towering height. And it was swift, too. I felt a draught at the back of my neck—a breath of wind. And instantly, as if a battering ram had been let swing past me at many layers of stretched gauze, I beheld, through a tattered deep hole in the fog, a roaring vision of flames, borne down and swimming up again; a dance of purple gleams on the strip of unveiled water, and three coal black figures in the light.

One of them stood high on lank black legs, with long black arms thrown up stiffly above the black shape of a hat. The two others crouched low on the very edge of the water, peering as if from an ambush.

The clearness of this vision was contained by a thick and a fiery atmosphere, into which a soft white rush and swirl of fog fell like a sudden whirl of snow. It closed down and overwhelmed at once the tall flutter of the flames, the black figures, the purple gleams playing round my oar. The hot glare had struck my eyeballs once, and that melted away again into the old, fiery stain on the mended fabric of the

fog. But the attitudes of the crouching men left no room for doubt that we had been seen. I expected a sudden uplifting of voices on the shore, answered by cries from the sea, and I screamed excitedly at Castro to lay hold of his oar.

He did not stir, and after my shouts, which must have fallen on the scared ears with a weird and unearthly note, a profound silence attended us—the silence of a superstitious fear: And, instead of howls, I heard, before the boat had travelled its own short length, a voice that seemed to be the voice of fear itself asking, "Did you hear that?" and a trembling mutter of an invocation to all the saints. Then a strangled throat trying to pronounce firmly, "The soul of the dead Inglez. Crying for pain."

Admiral Rowley's seamen, so miserably thrown away in the ill-conceived attack on the bay, were making a ghostly escort to our escape. Those dead boats'-crews were supposed to haunt the fatal spot, after the manner of spectres that linger in remorse, regret, or revenge, about the gates of departure. I had blundered; the fog, breaking apart, had betrayed us. But my obscure and vanquished country-men held possession of the outlet by memory of their courage. In this critical moment it was they, I may say, who stood by us.

We, on our part, must have been disclosed, dark, indistinct, utterly inexplicable; completely unexpected; an apparition of stealthy shades. The painful voice in the fog said:

"Let them be. Answer not. They shall pass on, for none of them died on the shore—all in the water. Yes, all in the water."

Part Five: Chapter One.

"*Why have I been brought here your worship?*" I asked with a great deal of firmness.

There were two figures in black, the one beside, the other behind a large black table. I was placed in front of them between two dirty soldiers, in the centre of a large, gaunt room, with bare, dirty walls, and the arms of Spain above the judge's seat.

"*You are before the Juez de la Primera Instancia,*" *said the*

man in black beside the table. He wore a large and shadowy tricorn. "Be silent, and respect the procedure."

It was, without doubt, excellent advice. *He whispered some words in the ear of the Judge of the First Instance. It was plain enough to me that the judge was quite an inferior official, who merely decided whether there was any case against the accused;* he had, even to his clerk, an air of timidity, of doubt.

I said: "But I insist on knowing. . . ."

The clerk said: "In good time. . . ." And then, in the same tone of disinterested official routine, *he spoke to the Lugareño, who, from beside the door,* rolled very frightened eyes *from the judges and the clerk to myself and the soldiers—* "Advance."

The judge, in a hurried, perfunctory voice, put questions to the Lugareño; the clerk scratched with a large quill on a sheet of paper.

"*Where do you come from?*"

"*The town of Rio Medio, excellency.*"

"*Of what occupation?*"

"*Excellency—a few goats. . . .*"

"*Why are you here?*"

"*My daughter, excellency, married Pepe of the posada in the Calle. . . .*"

The judge said, "Yes, yes," with an unsanguine impatience. The Lugareño's dirty hands jumped nervously on the large rim of his limp hat.

"*You lodge a complaint against the señor there.*"

The clerk pointed the end of his quill towards me.

"*I? God forbid, excellency,*" *the Lugareño bleated.* The Alguazil of the Criminal Court instructed me to be watchful. . . ."

Part Five: The End.

A long time after a harsh voice said:

"*Your excellency, we retire, of course, from the prosecution.*"

A different one directed:

"*Gentlemen of the jury you will return a verdict of 'Not Guilty' . . .*"

Down below they were cheering uproariously because my life was saved. But it was I that had to face my saved life. I sat there, my head bowed into my hands. The old judge was speaking to me in a tone of lofty compassion:

"You have suffered much, as it seems, but suffering is the lot of us men. Rejoice now that your character is cleared; that here in this public place you have received the verdict of your countrymen that restores you to the liberties of our country and the affection of your kindred. I rejoice with you who am a very old man at the end of my life. . . ."

It was rather tremendous, his deep voice, his weighted words. Suffering is the lot of us men. . . . The formidable legal array, the great powers of a nation, had stood up to teach me that, and they had taught me that—suffering is the lot of us men!

. . . . . .

It takes long enough to realize that someone is dead at a distance. I had done that. But how long, how long it needs to know that the life of your heart has come back from the dead. For years afterwards I could not bear to have her out of my sight.

Of our first meeting in London all I can remember is a speechlessness that was like the awed hesitation of our overtried souls before the greatness of a change from the verge of despair to the opening of a supreme joy. The whole world, the whole of life, with her return had changed all around me; it enveloped me, it enfolded me so lightly as not to be felt, so suddenly as not to be believed in, so completely that that whole meeting was an embrace, so softly that at last it lapsed into a sense of rest that was like the fall of a beneficent and welcome death.

For suffering is the lot of man, but not inevitable failure or worthless despair which is without end—suffering, the mark of manhood, which bears within its pain a hope of felicity like a jewel set in iron. . . .

Her first words were:

"You broke our compact. You went away from me whilst I was sleeping." Only the deepness of her reproach revealed the depth of her love, and the suffering she too had endured to reach a union that was to be without end—and to forgive.

And, looking back, we see Romance—that subtle thing that is mirage—that is life. It is the goodness of the years we have lived through, of the old time when we did this or that, when we dwelt here or there. Looking back it seems a wonderful enough thing that I who am this and she who is that, commencing so far away a life that after such sufferings borne together and apart, ended so tranquilly there in a world so stable—that she and I should have passed through so much, good chance and evil chance, sad hours and joyful, all lived down and swept away into the little heap of dust that is life. That, too, is Romance.

LAUGHING ANNE

INTRODUCTION

CONRAD'S three plays, *One Day More*, *Laughing Anne*, and *The Secret Agent*, are all adaptations from stories, and the first two mentioned in this volume have, curiously enough, the same main theme—the suffering of a woman capable of self-sacrifice. The fact that they are adaptations makes it the more difficult to answer the usual speculation whether this great novelist could, if he had given his time to the task, have become a great dramatist—a speculation, indeed, somewhat idle. In a writing life of thirty years a man has time for much variety. We know that Conrad had a keen dramatic sense; we know—at least I know—that he had fitful longings to write for the stage. And the fact that he never, in all those years, wrote directly for it is, to me, proof that his nature recoiled too definitely from the limitations which the stage imposes on word painting and the subtler efforts of a psychologist. The novel suited his nature better than the play, and he instinctively kept to it. If, through unhappy accident, he had begun by writing for the stage, without having first experienced the wider freedom and tasted the more exquisite savour of the novel, he would no doubt have become one of the greatest dramatists of our time. But we should have lost by it, for, as a novelist, he was in many respects unique.

The process of adaptation is, generally, fatal to the achievement of a stage masterpiece; yet in *One Day More* Conrad so nearly achieved a little masterpiece as to show natural aptitude of the highest order.

It is, in some sort, fitting that I should write this

introduction, since that first of his adaptations for the stage was made in my studio workroom on Campden Hill. Conrad worked at one end of it, on *One Day More*, while at the other end, I was labouring at *The Man of Property*. He sat at a table close to the big window, I stood at a desk, with my back to him, and now and then we would stop and exchange lamentations on the miseries of our respective lots.

"My dear fellow," he would say, "this is too horrible for words." Conrad did not suffer from satisfaction with his own work; yet *One Day More* gave him a certain pleasure when he had finished it, and he was eager to see it performed.

He wrote from Capri in May, 1905: "Another piece of news is that (would you believe it?) the Stage Society wishes to perform *To-morrow*" (as it was then called) "next June. Colvin wrote me. Several men, and amongst them G. B. Shaw, profess themselves very much struck." They were right to be struck—the little play has a strange and haunting quality. Old Hagberd, Harry, and Bessie, are very remarkable creations.

Not being in England when it was performed, I cannot recall what sort of reception it had from the *cognoscenti* of the Stage Society; but it has evidently been too weird and uncompromising a little piece of tragedy for London Town at large.

I do not know when Conrad adapted *Laughing Anne* from the story *Because of the Dollars*, and indeed never read it till I came to write this preface. Demanding in its short life three scene-sets, none of them easy, and the last exceptionally difficult in stage conditions, it has, as yet I believe, never been performed. It exemplifies that kind of innocence which novelists commonly have as to what will "go down" on the stage. Conrad probably never realized that a "man without hands"

would be an almost unbearable spectacle; that what you can write about freely cannot always be endured by the living eye. Anyone who has passed over the Bridge of Galata in the old days—which, very likely, are the new days too—and seen what the beggars there offered to one's sense of pity, will appreciate the physical shuddering inspired by that particular deformity. The lighting, too, of the last scene would be most difficult—effects which depend on shudderings grounded in dim light are to be avoided. A moment or two—yes; but a whole scene—no! To read this play, however, is a pleasure. The figures of Davidson, of poor Laughing Anne, of Fector, Bamtz, and the monster without hands, are thoroughly effective; and, except for those physical drawbacks, the play is admirably contrived.

It is exceedingly fortunate that we have in this volume examples of Conrad's dramatic art, which disclose at once what he did, and what he could have done; yet convince us, perhaps, that he was right in not further sacrificing the novel to the drama. In this connection I am tempted to refer here to the longer adaptation of that most impressive novel *The Secret Agent;* for we have therein a salient illustration, not only of the difficulty of adaptation, but of the fundamental difference between novel and drama as a medium for presenting life. *The Secret Agent* was a novel of atmosphere, a revelation of hidden depths in human nature, and a sort of creation of an underworld. It depended for its triumph on innumerable subtleties, and the fidelity of a sustained mood. Those of us, not many, who work in both forms, know, to a degree not possible, perhaps, to those who work in one, or work in neither, the cruel obstacles which the physical conditions of the stage put in the way of the sustained mood. I would say that the stage, as a faithful vehicle

of mood, falls as far short of the novel as the cinema falls short of the stage. All Art admittedly depends on craft, on the sort of devising which we call technique; even the novel, that most liberal and elastic medium, has its own severities, makes its own rigorous demands on ingenuity, dramatic instinct, and selective power—but they are difficulties to be overcome in a strict privacy, by the writer steeped in his mood, camped on his theme without interference. In writing for the stage the cramp of a hundred and one extra influences comes into play, device becomes trick work, selection is dictated to by physical conditions beyond control. The confirmed novelist, accustomed to freedom and his own conscience, is often given to impatience, and a measure of contempt towards even his own writing for the stage. That merely means, as a rule, that he does not realize the basic difference between the two forms. And, however good a novelist such an one may be, he will inevitably be an indifferent dramatist. A form must "enthuse" one, as the Americans say, before one can do it justice. One cannot approach the stage successfully without profound respect, and a deep recognition that its conditions are the essentials of an appeal totally distinct from that of the novel.

I do not think that Conrad was ignorant of this—not at all. His shortcomings were due, partly, to the almost insuperable difficulties of adaptation, and, partly, to inadequate mastery of trick work which has to be learned. In other words, he had not given enough time to the dramatic form. He did not quite know how to balance his effects, how to economize his words, or how to keep his line of action clear and inevitable. A little more experience would have shown him, for instance, that the *salon* scene, as written, in his dramatic version of *The Secret Agent*, was dead wood.

I read his adaptation in manuscript before the play was produced, and in answer to a somewhat critical letter, received one which contains passages that should, I think, be put on record:

"My general attitude finally was this: That considering that very likely I will never write another play, that I can't have any pretensions to dramatic gifts, though I have my own ideas as to the artistic reproductions of life, that the rules of any art contain in their summarized expression as much error as truth, and also a certain admixture of completely uureasonable prejudice (as, for instance, in the art of painting the not quite one hundred years' old pronouncement of a famous connoisseur that 'a picture to be good should be brown like an old fiddle')—that, considering all this, I could allow free play to my temperament, attending only to the plain sense and clear connection of the story . . . I resolved, in short, to write a Conrad play, not straining stage conditions unduly for the sake of originality, but stretching them out to my conception for the sake of that freedom (possibly in wrong directions) by which no art is ever injured. . . .

"I have often felt that not only the third but the second act should come out altogether. After all, why the Professor? Why the Assistant Commissioner? Even Inspector Heat himself would be sufficiently characterized by his appearance in the third act, if it were not for the actual subject of the play. . . . The subject is *not* the murder of Mr. Verloc by his wife and what subsequently happens to her. It is all a matter of *feeling*, without which the existence of Mrs. Verloc's mother as a personage in the play could not be very well justified. For, after all, what is that old woman doing there? She too could be eliminated; and also Mr. Vladimir. Indeed I was tempted, or I might have been

tempted, to begin the play with the three delightful anarchs sitting in the parlour round the fire, and Mr. Verloc explaining to them the circumstances which force him to throw a bomb at some building or other, discussing ways and means, and ending the effective scene by taking Stevie by the scruff of the neck, 'Come along, youngster, you carry the bomb,' and Comrade Ossipon blowing a kiss, as they all go out at the door, to Mrs. Verloc, who stands horrorstruck in the middle of the stage. Curtain. From there one could go, direct, without changing a word, to the third scene of the fourth act, and on to the end, obtaining a rather pretty Guignol play with no particular trouble.

"All this is perfectly direct and certainly would not lag by the way; but it would miss altogether the subject of the play, which in its nature, I mean the play, is purely illustrative. It is because of that nature that I have let it spread itself into scenes which from the point of action alone may, and obviously do, appear superfluous and detached from the subject. Whereas to my feeling they are all closely to the point.

"I admit that I wrote the play to be acted, but at the same time I will tell you frankly that I look with no pleasurable anticipation to seeing it on the stage. The mere thought of what a perfectly well-meaning actor may make in the way of conventionalized villain of my Professor, which I assure you is quite a serious attempt to illustrate a mental and emotional state which had its weight in the affairs of the world, gives me a little shudder."

This is Conrad's defence of the play as it stands. It is weighty, but does not go quite to the root of the matter, for all the feeling and illustrative value as he put into the play would have been preserved, and could even have been increased, by the elimination of *lon-*

gueurs, if his technique had been equal to the task; in other words, if he had given some of the years he gave to the novel to writing drama instead. And, anyway, the mood and illustrative value of his theme did not and could not receive as full expression in the play as it did in the novel.

So that it comes back to this: one is glad he didn't give time enough to play-writing. Those of us who remember that amazing cab drive in the novel—the gem passage of *The Secret Agent*—unrenderable on the stage, realize very well that his time was better concentrated on an unfettered fidelity to his moods in his unflinching scrutiny of men and things, on his power of painting in words, and on a psychological insight unsurpassed for depth and subtlety.

Of the actual production of *The Secret Agent*, which I thought left much to be desired, Conrad wrote with his characteristic generosity: "Now it is all over, my state may be described as that of serene joy, only marred by remorse at the injustice of my past thoughts towards the actors, who had a lot of characters certainly not of a 'stock' kind thrown at their heads just twenty days before the first performance. Now, like a man touched by grace, I think of them with actual tenderness and almost with affection. . . .

"The disagreeable part of this business is to see wasted the hard work of people who depend on it for their livelihood, and for whom success would mean assured employment and ease of mind. One feels guilty somehow."

There spoke the heart of Conrad, for ever in sympathy with men and women who did their job as well as they could, and thinking of others before himself.

JOHN GALSWORTHY.

September, 1924.

LAUGHING ANNE

LAUGHING ANNE

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION OF PERSONAGES IN THE PLAY

DAVIDSON: About 35. Plump, round face, little fair moustache. Fair hair parted on the side. Very quiet manner and voice, with a sort of habitual half-smile. Is dressed in the usual tropical white drill suit, tunic and trousers. From second button of tunic to the left side pocket a gold watch-chain across his breast. White shoes and white tropical helmet. As general definition, a kindly "delicate soul in a comfortable envelope."

HOLLIS: 40. Dark, clean-shaven, close-cropped. Same kind of clothes as Davidson.

[These two men are well groomed; their white clothes spotlessly got up.]

BAMTZ: Lanky, long, loose, black beard streaked with grey over his breast. Dressed in white trousers with belt. Grey shirt. No collar. Linen jacket worn open. All this dingy. Pair of old white shoes. Lounging, casual, lazy bearing. Drawling voice. Propensity to cringe.

FECTOR: Short. A shaven, sour, little red face. Nervous, impudent bearing. Dress: white trousers and a very old shooting jacket (which he had brought with him years ago from home). Shabby brown shoes.

NAKHODA: Smooth, round, yellow face with thickish dark lips and thin drooping moustache—a few hairs only on face. Dress: a tunic like Davidson's, only instead of being white it must be made of very thin blue flannel. Instead of trousers, a Malay sarong of common check pattern (or any other for that matter). On head a small round skull-cap. On his bare brown feet a pair of patent-leather slippers. Jaunty, fatuous bearing.

[The above three men have the common characteristic of slight jumpiness.]

MAN WITHOUT HANDS: Need not be actually tall and stout but must give the impression of a *big* man. Large face, with rather long black hair brushed up from a high forehead. Black eyes. Moves ponderously. Dress: white trousers cut very broad at hip, very narrow at ankle, held up at waist by a faded sash. He has no shirt, but only a thin singlet, over which he wears open a roomy linen jacket with side pockets. White shoes. Overbearing manner. Deep voice.

ANNE: In First Act. A faded pink princess robe with a train and some ragged white lace trimming at neck and sleeves. (Last remnant of her old outfit.) Hair untidy. Old white satin shoes.

In Second Act. A piece of chintz made up like a chemise dress with straps over shoulders. Head tied in a red handkerchief and hair loose down her back. Straw slippers on bare feet. Necklace of yellow beads.

TONY: Dingy white blouse and short knickers, bare legs and feet. Sunburnt. Head of tight chestnut curls.

ACT I

SCENE represents back verandah of Macao Hotel, seen from the interor. At the back the columns of the verandah with creepers and view of the sky, between the supports of the verandah there is a balustrade; end-on to the audience two tables, of which one is covered with a white cloth. Remnants of a meal and a couple of glasses. Abreast of those tables and close to the balustrade, right and left, there are invisible stairs leading down to the ground. Right and left towards the proscenium two whitewashed walls, of which the left has got a half-glazed door and the right just a common doorway nearly flush with the wall.

DAVIDSON *and* HOLLIS *sitting at table.* DAVIDSON'S *helmet and* HOLLIS'S *white cap on the floor. From time to time a slight breath of air stirs the creepers on the column. The light should be suggestive of bright sunshine outside.*

HOLLIS. Here we have been yarning of old times for an hour or so in this damned Macao Hotel and I never asked you why you frequent such a place.

DAVIDSON. I don't frequent it. Never been here before in my life, but my ship is in dry dock. There is no cooking on board a ship in dry dock, and as I didn't want to go back to town I thought I would try to get a bite here. It's a low place but I don't suppose they put poison in one's dishes because one's a stranger.

HOLLIS [*dry tone*]. No. Many a stranger has been drugged here though, and rooked of all his cash.

Every shady loafer, ruffian and scallywag in the Islands finds his way to this place sooner or later. Don't you remember how we used to warn young fellows against being enticed in here? I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw you at the door. I wouldn't have liked to be seen coming in here. Not by myself. With you it's another matter.

DAVIDSON [*faint smile*]. Why?

HOLLIS [*jocular*]. Because no breath of suspicion ever rested on you. [*Laughs a little.*] My dear fellow, don't you remember how we used to call you "good Davidson," "good Davy." To your own face, too.

DAVIDSON [*placid*]. There was a lot of chaff flying about amongst our lot.

HOLLIS [*reminiscent*]. Wild lot, too, we were. But you were the quietest.

DAVIDSON. Old times, now . . . [*Sighs.*]

HOLLIS [*pursuing his idea. With a sort of eagerness, elbows on table*]. Do you remember that clever naturalist chap that now and then chummed with us? He said of you once that he had never seen such a kind soul in such a comfortable envelope. Ha! Ha! Ha! Comfortable envelope! That was good.

DAVIDSON [*wipes his forehead with his handkerchief*]. Phew! It's hot! He had his own style of joking. He is a great scientific man at home now. I have got his famous book on board my ship. Phew! The heat!

HOLLIS. We are more likely to get a little air from the sea at the back here than in the front of the house. And anyhow I wouldn't like to be seen in public here, though, of course, with you it wouldn't matter so much.

DAVIDSON [*placid smile*]. Am I so very respectable?

HOLLIS. No, no. I don't mean that, I mean just good. Exactly as in the old days . . . You look it, you know.

DAVIDSON [*mock resignation*]. I can't help my looks.

HOLLIS. No, you can't. Any more than the rest of us could help being wild and looking it too.

DAVIDSON [*placid smile*]. Lively, lively. Good fellows tho'.

HOLLIS. Where are they all? Scattered to the four winds of heaven.

DAVIDSON [*leaning on his elbow*]. Aye. Not enough ballast, most of them. And Harry was the most flighty of the lot. You remember Harry the Pearler?

HOLLIS. Why! Yes. The fellow with a girl of his own. He brought her out here from Western Australia or somewhere that way. She was a good sort too. But those are old times and no mistake. I wonder what became of her.

DAVIDSON [*wiping brow*]. Phew! The heat! I fancy Harry dropped her. One used to hear of Laughing Anne turning up here and there amongst the Islands. The name stuck to her.

HOLLIS [*surprised*]. You heard it lately?

DAVIDSON. Oh, dear no! She vanished years ago; and Harry the Pearler is dead, and I suppose there is nobody to remember him now but you and I. And yet we two are not so very old.

HOLLIS. Years in the tropics count double, my boy. We have kept wonderfully. But the most wonderful thing is that you and I should come together in this place which is notoriously the rendezvous of all sorts of bad characters for a thousand miles round.

DAVIDSON. I tell you I came here to get something to eat, while waiting for my ship to come out of dock. [*Above the level of the floor to the left of* HOLLIS'S *chair appears the head of* FECTOR *in an old grey felt hat.*]

HOLLIS. Same old ship, I suppose?

DAVIDSON. Oh, yes . . . Ten or twelve years now. Nice little ship. I've got very fond of her.

HOLLIS [*dreamily*]. Yes. Same old Islands, same old reefs, same old worries, same old trade.

DAVIDSON [*placid*]. Pretty well. Only I don't worry now. I can find my way about this part of the world with my eyes shut. However, this trip will be out of the common. It is going to be a dollar-collecting trip amongst other things. I expect I will have sixty thousand of them before I am done . . . You know, packed in wooden cases.

HOLLIS [*moves his chair a bit and* FECTOR'S *head vanishes instantly*]. I wouldn't talk loudly about it in a place like this.

DAVIDSON. Why? You seem as bad as my wife. She is quite nervous about the danger. [*Laughs placidly.*] I told her that there are no pirates nowadays in the Archipelago, except in boys' books.

HOLLIS. Well, no. All the same in a den like this I wouldn't . . .

DAVIDSON. What's the matter? Sixty thousand dollars in cases is not a job for a pickpocket, is it? I am having one of the ship's store-rooms fitted for the purpose of putting those cases in. [*While* DAVIDSON *is speaking the half-glazed door comes open a little way and* FECTOR *puts his head through. He withdraws it at*

once but leaves the door ajar. The faint clicking of billiard balls is heard periodically.]

HOLLIS [*grimly*]. The crowd that drinks here wouldn't be up to piracy. Not they. Regular shore-sweepings they are. I noticed one or two notorious characters on the front verandah. That fellow Fector who calls himself a journalist, was one.

DAVIDSON [*surprised*]. A journalist!

HOLLIS [*scornful*]. He calls himself a journalist as some receivers of stolen goods call themselves marine dealers. He has been kicked and horsewhipped in every place from Aden to Shanghai for a swindler and blackmailer . . . And I am hanged if I didn't catch sight in the bar of a loafer I thought was dead long ago. Surely you would have heard of Bamtz.

DAVIDSON [*doubtful*]. Didn't he have a great beard?

HOLLIS. Horrid. That's how I recognized him. Same old beard. There was never such a beard seen from here to Polynesia, where you can sell a beard for hard cash any day. But Bamtz used his beard for prestige—you know. There was a tale going of him wheedling trading privileges once from the late Sultan of Sulu on the strength of his beard. Damn it all! One can understand a fellow living by cadging and small swindles in towns in large communities of people, but Bamtz has been doing that trick for years in the wilderness. Cadging for his living on the edge of the virgin forest! Of course he isn't the sort that would hurt a fly. He would be afraid to tackle a fly. [*Confused noise of voices through the door which is ajar.*]

HOLLIS [*looks over his shoulder, gets up, shuts the door. Comes back to his seat*]. Didn't notice that door wasn't shut. . . . Bamtz does look like a pirate, I must

say, but he calls himself an accountant, book-keeper, or something of that sort. [*Left door opens and* FECTOR *lounges in, hands in pockets, jaunty, advances to table.*] Now, what do you want here?

FECTOR [*assumed dignity*]. This is a public place.

HOLLIS. You can't ferret out anything here you could sell.

FECTOR. What do you take me for?

HOLLIS. Eavesdropper, blackmailer, forger—take your choice.

FECTOR [*reeling a little as if drunk*]. Oh, yes, yes. I am used to hear that sort of thing. Every man with a mission is insulted. My mission always was to track out abuses and fight them. And I won't be driven out. This is the coolest place in the blamed den and I am going to sit here. [*Reels slightly to the other table, sits down, throws his arms on the table and rests his head on them.*]

HOLLIS [*low tone*]. This is impossible. . . . Shall we go? [*Gets up.*]

DAVIDSON [*who has been wiping his forehead, getting matches, cigar, lighting it and taking puffs, pulls out handkerchief, wipes his forehead*]. It's too frightfully hot yet. I think I will sit here for another hour before I go to the dock. [*Slight snore from* FECTOR.] I don't mind him.

HOLLIS [*with a look at* FECTOR. *Tone of disgust*]. I didn't know he drank too. I can't stand that beast. . . . [*Persuasive.*] We could drive to town together.

DAVIDSON. I can't. I must walk over to the ship presently to see about that store-room for the dollars.

I expect to have forty or more cases on my return trip. [*He gets up to shake hands.*]

HOLLIS [*affectionate*]. Well, good luck to you, Davidson. We may not come across each other again very soon. It was good to have a yarn with you about old times. [*Ready to go.*]

DAVIDSON [*cordial*]. Yes. . . . I say! Won't you go and see my wife? She would know your name in a moment.

HOLLIS [*moving towards the stairs right. Jocular*]. Do you mean to say that you talk to your wife of old times? [*Moves off laughing.*]

DAVIDSON [*calls out after* HOLLIS *placidly*]. She is all right.

[*Exit* HOLLIS. FECTOR *who had raised his head slightly while the others were taking leave of each other drops it on his arms at once.* DAVIDSON *sits down heavily, giving a glance at* FECTOR *and goes on smoking. After a pause* FECTOR *raises himself, gets up, sways very slightly.*]

FECTOR [*thickly*]. Captain Davidson, I believe. [DAVIDSON *nods.*] Of the steamship *Sissie.* [DAVIDSON *hardly nods.*] One of the most respected shipmasters in port. Allow me to ask . . .

DAVIDSON [*placid.*] No use. I won't give you a drink. You have had enough already.

FECTOR [*pulls out a small pad and pencil from his pocket*]. I only wanted to ask your opinion of this new currency scheme.

DAVIDSON [*mildly*]. Oh, get out.

FECTOR [*change of bearing and venomous tone*]. That's what I am going to do. I am going out. Heat or no heat. . . . Where the devil's my hat? [*Exit into the billiard-room, slams door behind him, leaving* DAVIDSON *astonished. But very soon* DAVIDSON *wipes his brow again, breeze rustles the creepers,* DAVIDSON *takes a deep breath.*]

DAVIDSON. That's better. [*Dozes lightly, cigar drops out of his fingers, the door on right opens, and* ANNE *puts her head out, perceives a man there, draws her head in, then puts it out again, looks hard at* DAVIDSON, *then comes out, shuts the door after her and approaches him step by step. Stops, peers, throws her arms up, claps her hands in extreme wonder.*]

ANNE. My God! It's Davy! [*Somewhat shrill.*]

DAVIDSON [*wakes up with a start, jumps up amazed*]. What, what's this?

ANNE [*advances, arms extended, seizes him by the shoulders*]. Why, you have hardly changed at all. The same good Davy. [*Characteristic clear laugh, a little wild.*]

DAVIDSON [*starts in all his limbs. Awed tone of voice*]. You—you are Laughing Anne!

ANNE [*approaching her face to his a little*]. All that's left of her, Davy . . . all that's left of her. [*Her hands slip off* DAVIDSON'S *shoulders, head droops. Suddenly she fumbles in pocket for rag of handkerchief, puts it to her eyes, choked voice.*] It's years since I heard myself called by that name. [*Drops hands again.*]

DAVIDSON [*looking all round, ceiling, floor, walls, still awe-struck*]. Where on earth did you come from?

ANNE. From that room.

DAVIDSON [*dazed*]. Room? Where? What room?

ANNE [*short peal of laughter*]. Through that door—there.

DAVIDSON. A door? Can't be! [*Recovering himself.*] Oh, that door! I thought I was dreaming.

ANNE. No dream, Davy! It's I in the flesh. The very Laughing Anne . . . [*Break in voice. Desolate.*] Oh, Davy! Harry ought not to have cast me off. It's he who led me astray.

DAVIDSON [*sympathetic. Grave face*]. He died some years ago. Perhaps you heard?

ANNE [*nods slightly*]. Yes, I heard. [*They look at each other with a sort of desolation, meantime the door on the right opens and a small boy of about six or seven runs out and catches hold of* ANNE'S *skirt.*]

DAVIDSON [*starts back*]. What's this?

ANNE [*laugh*]. Why! Don't you know a small boy when you see him, Davy? [*Tone of anguish.*] That's my Tony.

DAVIDSON [*very low, after looking at the child*]. Harry's?

ANNE [*also very low*]. No. Another's. What would you have? What was I to do? [*Changed tone to the child.*] Say how do you do to the good gentleman.

BOY [*extending grimy paw to* DAVIDSON. *Merrily and quite unabashed*]. Bonjour.

DAVIDSON. Eh? [*Lets go of boy's hand suddenly and looks distracted*].

ANNE. Run away now. That's a good boy. [*Exit child.*]

DAVIDSON. Can't he speak English?

ANNE. Oh, yes, he is picking it up. Some dear old French people in Saigon were taking care of him for me. I picked up with the skipper of a German ship, and was going with him up and down the China Sea. Then at the end of two years or so he tells me "This is all over, mein taubchen. I must go home and marry the girl I am engaged to." He didn't look very happy about it, so I laughed and went ashore. We parted friends, but oh, Davy! it was no laughing matter for me. I had to take the boy away from those French people who were going back to France; and there I was. I was tired of life and down on my luck, I can tell you, when a fellow called Bamtz turned up. I suppose even such as he want company.

DAVIDSON [*making a movement of dismay*]. You—are—with Bamtz? [*Shocked.*]

ANNE [*nods*]. Yes, I know. But it was for the kid. How could I have kept him with me if I had to knock about in towns? And this Bamtz is not a brute. He seems real fond of him. . . . I suppose I ought to thank God for that.

DAVIDSON [*exclaims with feeling*]. Thank God for Bamtz! [*Drop in voice.*] My poor Anne.

ANNE [*with a reckless wave of her arm*]. For the boy! . . . So I gave him the few poor little trinkets I had to sell and he took me away to a little native place three hundred miles from here where no white man ever comes. The Rajah there has given us a big hut to live in. There is nothing but forests all round, Davy, but like this the boy needn't ever know that his mother was a painted woman.

DAVIDSON [*anxious tone*]. But what brought you here?

ANNE. We got a passage in a native boat. Bamtz thinks he could manage to trade enough to keep body and soul together—the three of us, out there—in the forest—out of men's sight, if he could only get a ship to call for produce now and then. Twice a year would do. Oh, Davy, you have a ship. You can do what you like; God has put you in my way. Say yes, Davy, just twice a year and that will be enough for us to live on. Shall I fetch him out to you now so that he hears it from your own mouth. Yes? . . . [*Runs lightly to the door of the billiard-room, puts her head in. Clicking of billiard-balls heard.*]

DAVIDSON [*irresolute*]. Wait. [BAMTZ *comes through the door shutting it behind him. Slight check at sight of* DAVIDSON, *one hand in his pocket.* ANNE *drags at his other arm.*]

ANNE. Come along. Captain Davidson will be our friend.

BAMTZ [*jerks arm away, puts other hand in pocket. Weak face, long streaked beard, seems as if unscrewed at the waist, careless lounging attitudes which conceal his propensity to cringe. Advances towards* DAVIDSON, *who is looking at him fixedly*]. Good morning, Captain.

DAVIDSON [*looking at him keenly, but in a placid voice*]. She tells me that you think you have some prospects of trade over there where you live.

BAMTZ [*drawling*]. Prospects . . . Yaas. I know how to manage the natives and there's a little capital—if you would only promise to call for produce.

DAVIDSON. You know you will have to behave decently.

ANNE. He has been always kind, only . . . [*Makes a movement with her hand.*]

BAMTZ [*looking in the air and as if speaking to himself. Drawling*]. A pinch of dollars in hand—a cheap necklace—a set of bangles—a brooch or two . . . Here's . . . [*jerks head at* ANNE] capital.

DAVIDSON [*with a sort of grim placidity*]. I see. [*Reflects.*] I could probably arrange a call, only . . .

ANNE [*clasping her hands*]. Say yes, Davy. Think of that poor kid.

BAMTZ [*with a little more interest in his voice, to* DAVIDSON]. See him, Captain? Cute little customer. [*Returns to listless attitude.*]

DAVIDSON. Suppose you leave me with her for a moment. [BAMTZ *makes a move at once.*] You had better keep clear now of that billiard-room.

BAMTZ [*lounging off, hands in pockets*]. Yaas, a low lot in there. I never cared for them, but sometimes one must . . . [*Lounges off into bedroom.*]

DAVIDSON [*placidly anxious*]. Would you trust him? Do you think you could stick it out?

ANNE [*moves lightly to billiard-room door and turns the key saying*]. A lot of these beasts there. Eavesdropping too. We have been here four days. . . . [*With ardour.*] No more paint and dyes for me, Davy, if you will do what he asks you to do. Stick it out? Can't I! You know I have always stuck to my men through thick and thin, till they had enough of me. And now look at what's left of me. But inside I am what I always was. I have acted on the square to them, one after another. I was a pal worth having.

But men do get tired of one. They don't understand women. [*Characteristic short peal of laughter.*]

DAVIDSON [*placidly anxious*]. Don't, Anne.

ANNE [*puts handkerchief to her eyes and sobs, while the door of the billiard-room is tried from outside and then shaken a bit*]. Harry is the only man I ever loved. He ought not to have cast me off.

DAVIDSON [*quiet feeling*]. Well, I will be your friend. Tell Bamtz to expect me in a month's time. Keep him clear of that crowd and get away from here as quick as ever you can.

ANNE. We can leave to-night in a native boat. Trust me. [*Seizing his hands and shaking them.*] It's for the kid, Davy. It's for the kid. [*Moves towards bedroom. At door turns round to say*]: Isn't he a bright little chap?

[DAVIDSON *wipes his forehead with pocket handkerchief. Looks at watch. While he is doing these things the door of the billiard-room is shaken again. He gives it a mere glance, puts his watch in his pocket. Picks his hat from the floor and goes downstairs right. Almost directly after,* FECTOR'S *head appears up the stairs left and seeing there is no one there he strides straight to the billiard-room door, turns the key.*]

FECTOR. I wonder who locked that door. [*Reflects.*] Would it be Bamtz. Hullo! Bamtz! You there? [*Waits.*] I got a dollar for you. [*Door of the bedroom comes ajar and voice of* BAMTZ *is heard.*]

BAMTZ. Let me go and see. [*Comes out and at once assumes his lounging, casual, hesitating bearing.*] What's that you said?

FECTOR [*dollar in hand*]. Your winnings, I believe.

BAMTZ [*looking into the air*]. Oh, yaas! [*Extends open palm.*]

FECTOR [*putting dollar in his pocket*]. You damned fraud, you knew you had no winnings . . . I only want to talk to you.

BAMTZ [*concealing his discomfiture and sidling away*]. I'm not interested—ah—in your talk.

FECTOR. You will jolly well have to be. Why did you lock that door?

BAMTZ [*alarmed*]. I didn't. I swear I didn't.

FECTOR. You have been plotting something in there with that woman you have got in tow. You haven't the right to lock any door in this house. It's offensive. This is a public place. Don't you want to keep friendly with the crowd?

BAMTZ [*desperate*]. I don't want to be friends with any of you. I am done with you. Yaas. [*Impressively.*] I had a business interview here with Captain Davidson and I am glad the door was locked—whoever locked it.

FECTOR. Captain Davidson?

BAMTZ [*superior*]. Yaas.

FECTOR. Were you trying to cadge something out of him? Well, I'm hanged! . . . No! Don't go . . . Stop right here.

BAMTZ [*reluctant*]. Don't worry me. I'll have none of your tricks. I'm going to be a merchant—on the square.

FECTOR. Oh, you liar!

BAMTZ. Fact. Deal in island produce. Been discussing freights with Captain Davidson. That's the sort of man I am. He's going to call for the first lot in about a month's time.

FECTOR [*shout of astonishment*]. No! [BAMTZ *shuffling away towards the door puts his hand on the handle.*] Here! Don't go!

BAMTZ. I will have no truck with you. [*Exit.*]

FECTOR [*stands for a moment, chin in hand, obvious hesitation, then dashes at billiard-room door, puts his head in, withdraws it with exclamation*]. Gone. [*Runs to balustrade and shouts into garden*]: Hey, hey! . . . Yes, both of you. Come up here a moment. [*He walks front of stage and stands biting his fingers nervously, while up the stairs to left big bulk of* MAN WITHOUT HANDS *rises up, followed by the* NAKHODA. *They stand behind* FECTOR, M. W. H. *frowning, with his stumps rammed deep into the side pockets of jacket;* NAKHODA *with a sort of fatuous smile.*]

M. W. H. [*deep voice*]. Well! [*Waits.*] What's this infernal joke?

FECTOR [*walking up and down across the stage in agony of indecision*]. There's a damned big job . . . as big as a mountain.

M. W. H. [*angry bellow*]. Out with it, then.

FECTOR [*at a distance. Wringing his hands*]. I don't know whether I ought to trust you fellows. [*Stands still suddenly.*]

M. W. H. [*advancing ponderously at* FECTOR, *who quails, but also seems fascinated*]. You wouldn't dare to insult me if it hadn't been for my misfortune. [*Turns away towards front of stage raising his stumps and*

shaking them before him. Looking up to heaven with fury.] If I had my way, you up there would be damned too. Then you would know how I feel.

FECTOR. Don't blaspheme.

M. W. H. [*turns on him*]. If I could kill people with my eyes you wouldn't dare speak to me like this.

FECTOR. You manage to make me feel deadly sick with your beastly eyes. [*Quails but holds his ground.*]

M. W. H. [*deep voice*]. Out with your story—if you have one.

FECTOR [*passing him quickly to move to other side of the stage*]. I suppose I must. Listen. [M. W. H. *spins round and* NAKHODA, *who persistently keeps at his elbow, preserves his fatuous air.*] There will be in a month's time a ship, a little trading ship, travelling about the Java Sea with something like 80,000 dollars aboard of her.

M. W. H. [*contemptuous*]. Well, what of it? What's the good of it to anybody. There must be lots of ships with dollars—and gold in them too—afloat on the seas at this very moment.

FECTOR. Yes, but I know where that particular ship will be next month—the exact spot. A lonely spot. Inhabited by an ass called Bamtz.

M. W. H. [*walking up and down and gesticulating with his stumps*]. Bamtz! Bamtz! I know him inside out. A mere rag—dirty rag. We could do what we like with him.

NAKHODA. He's sailing with me to-night. I am giving him a passage to his home.

FECTOR [*strikes in*]. Which is the very spot.

M. W. H. Then, we must ask him for hospitality. [*Laughs.*] He is not a man that ever refuses anything to anybody. Man! He's a worm.

FECTOR. Eighty thousand dollars!

NAKHODA. That's twenty thousand each. Four of us. Including Bamtz.

M. W. H. You can't know how elated a poor cripple feels at the prospect of a little activity. [*Ferocious.*] You will have to go through with it now. I will keep your livers sweet for you. [*To* NAKHODA.] Isn't it time to get your passengers on board?

NAKHODA. Yes, we sail early to-night. I promised to come for them.

FECTOR. Well, here we are then. You *have* come for them. Go and get them out. [*While* NAKHODA *goes to knock at the door on right* FECTOR *and* M. W. H. *withdraw to left side and watch the performance. Dusk falls.* NAKHODA *knocks again.*]

NAKHODA [*speaking at the door*]. Time to go on board. [*The door opens and a voice from within says*]: We have been waiting for you [*and* BAMTZ *comes out first carrying a very dilapidated valise in his hand and wearing a ragged overcoat over his white clothes. Behind him* ANNE *in very shabby tussore long coat over the pink gown. She carries a bundle tied up in a check cloth and a native basket, and with the other hand leads* TONY. *They make for the stairs.* NAKHODA *watches them*].

M. W. H. [*quiet voice across the verandah*]. Bamtz.

BAMTZ [*starts, and is so upset that he drops the valise on the floor and leans his back against the wall*]. What do you want?

M. W. H. [*speaking across the verandah*]. I am going to resume my activities and as I happen to need your help your fortune is as good as made.

BAMTZ. For God's sake do leave me alone. I am no good for anything. I have no nerve . . . Never had any.

M. W. H. [*moving across ponderously. Soft voice*]. What *is* the matter? Can't you entertain a few friends in your new home for a few days?

BAMTZ. Keep off me. Go away. Leave me alone. I won't have it.

M. W. H. [*soft*]. Won't you? Not even for a stake of about 20,000 dollars or so?

BAMTZ. I know you of old. You were then worse than the devil himself.

M. W. H. [*taking his stumps out of his pocket and putting them close to* BAMTZ'S *face*]. See this? Well, since my misfortune I am ten times worse than before. Now then, go ahead. Move on. March. [*Terrible voice.*] Crawl, you worm. [TONY *begins to cry.* M. W. H. *seems to take notice of* ANNE *for the first time.*] Why! He's a family man. That's excellent.

ANNE [*to the whimpering child*]. Don't be frightened, Tony. He will do you no harm. [BAMTZ *has gone downstairs,* NAKHODA *has followed him and* M. W. H. *remains standing at head of stairs looking towards* ANNE.]

M. W. H. You have a nice voice. I am sure you will make us comfortable. [*Half jeering.*] In your retired home.

ANNE [*passionately*]. Ah, if he were only half a man! . . . Don't cry, Tony. It's all right.

M. W. H. Yes, if he were. I fancy you must be the better man of the two. Never mind. It suits me first rate. You'll be friends with me. A helpless, miserable cripple longing for a companion to take care of him . . . always. [*Puts his arm over* ANNE'S *shoulder and with the stump against her cheek turns her face round and looks into it.*] Frightened? No need to be. I am a harmless cripple. [*Takes arm off and gives her a push towards the stairs. As* ANNE, TONY, FECTOR *and* M. W. H. *move off in single file,* CURTAIN *falls.*]

ACT II: Scene 1

INTERIOR of a hut with walls of mats, unequally divided by a partition of rough mats. Wooden posts visible in corners. The biggest portion has an open doorway in wall at back and open doorway in dividing partition. Smaller part containing one keg, and bed-place made of wooden cases. Nightlight burning on the floor. Larger part contains oblong table in middle, four wooden chairs round it. On the table glasses, bottle, red earthenware jug, two candles. Fector, Nakhoda, Bamtz, *and* M. W. H. *sitting on chairs playing cards.* Anne *holding* M. W. H.'s *cards for him stands by his chair. The men are dressed as before.* Anne *in loose chintz wrapper and straw slippers on bare feet. Her head tied up Malay fashion in red handkerchief, with mass of loose hair hanging behind. Long necklace of amber beads hangs on her uncovered neck.*

M. W. H. Play the king of hearts.

Tony [*in cot in other room. Plaintive voice*]. Mama.

Anne [*throwing the cards down*]. Coming, dear. [*Passes into the other room. Seen bending over cot.* M. W. H., Fector, Nakhoda, Bamtz, *throw down cards.*]

M. W. H. The time is drawing near. Now, listen to me once more. [*Four heads in a bunch. Loud whispering, during which, without any noise,* Davidson *appears in the outer doorway, white cap, white clothes. Stands gazing till* Bamtz *looking up sees him and rises abruptly from his chair.*]

BAMTZ [*staring. Loud*]. Captain Davidson. [*In other room* ANNE *seen turning her head.*]

DAVIDSON [*grim but placid*]. I haven't startled you, have I?

ANNE [*in bedroom doorway*]. Davy! Heaven itself sends you here to-night.

BAMTZ [*dropping back into his chair. Loud voice*]. Come in, Captain. [*Falters.*] Come in.

ANNE [*extended arms towards* DAVIDSON]. My Tony's so bad. [*Seizes* DAVIDSON *by arm and tugs at it.*] Come along and see him. [M. W. H. *leans back in chair.* FECTOR *sits sideways, arm thrown over back of his chair.* NAKHODA *back to audience.* BAMTZ, *with appearance of extreme nervousness, looks up at* ANNE *and* DAVIDSON *as they pass by.*]

BAMTZ. Poor little beggar.

DAVIDSON [*leaning over cot.*] We want a better light here.

ANNE. Yes, Davy. [*Goes into big room, snatches up candle.*]

FECTOR [*scandalized*]. Hullo! Hullo!

M. W. H. Let her have it. [*Meantime* ANNE *passes in and with* DAVIDSON *examines child by light of candle.*]

DAVIDSON. He is a little hot. Don't you worry. Could you boil a little water for a drink?

ANNE. I have nothing here.

DAVIDSON [*very loud*]. I will just go on board and bring you a spirit kettle and some medicine that will do him good. [*Changed tone with movement of head towards the other room.*] What's this, Anne?

ANNE [*makes a gesture of raising hands and drops them*]. They would come.

DAVIDSON [*very loud*]. There is no danger whatever. [*Low voice.*] I am afraid this bodes no good to you, my poor girl. What do you think they are up to?

ANNE [*speaking very quickly*]. They are after the dollars you have in your ship.

DAVIDSON [*surprised but cautious*]. How on earth did they know I carry dollars on this trip?

ANNE [*intense*]. So you *have* dollars on board. Oh, Davy! Take your ship away quick.

DAVIDSON. Too late. The tide has left her already. Do they actually mean robbery? What do they take me for?

ANNE. That big man without hands wouldn't stick at murder. He is driving them on. He is a devil. If Tony hadn't been in this state I would have run away with him into the woods anywhere. . . . Oh, Davy! Will he die?

DAVIDSON. No, no. Don't get yourself in a state. You used to be plucky.

ANNE [*very quick*]. My pluck. It seems to be going. Ha—ha—ha. [*Little wild laugh.* DAVIDSON *passes to the other room where all the men at sound of* ANNE'S *laugh had turned their heads in a somewhat startled way.* ANNE *follows him with the candle, which she puts on the table, and returns to the child.*]

FECTOR. Will you join us in a drink, Captain?

DAVIDSON. I am in a hurry to fetch some drugs I have on board. [*Passes through doorway at the back.*

All get up from their seats except M. W. H. *who remains leaning back in his chair.*]

M. W. H. Now, get out all of you and see where the ship is moored—at the jetty or along the bank. We ought to know beforehand.

FECTOR. One of us would do.

M. W. H. No. I want each of you to know exactly where to put his foot when we board her in the dark, presently. You are such nervous skunks that you will be missing the gangway from sheer funk. I suppose when the time comes I will have to push you on—I! A miserable cripple! But when it comes to sharing, each of you will want his share.

FECTOR [*muttering*]. Certainly. [*Loud.*] Confound you, you bully us here from morning to night as if you had hired us for the job, whereas when it comes to it you won't be able to do anything.

M. W. H. [*shaking his stumps in front of his face*]. Curse my misfortune. [*With affected, savage cringing.*] I hope you won't try to cut down my share because I am a poor helpless, useless cripple. [*Ferocious.*] Get out and do what I tell you or else there will be nothing to share.

FECTOR. I will be glad when the job's over, if only to be done with your bullying.

BAMTZ. Oh God, yes! [M. W. H. *jumps up.* FECTOR *and* BAMTZ *make for the door, while* NAKHODA *dodges behind* M. W. H. *and is the last to go out.*]

M. W. H. [*standing by the table*]. Anne! [ANNE *in the other room raises her head from the cot with an air of terror.*] Anne! Here!

ANNE [*springs up from her knees*]. Oh, what is it now? [*Walks reluctant into the large room.*]

M. W. H. Now, then, pull yourself together. Where is that weight? Did you sneak it from the store?

ANNE [*faltering*]. I have got it there. [*Points to corner.*]

M. W. H. Quick then. Lose no time. Got a piece of string? [ANNE *stands stock-still with a face of despair.*] Ain't you going to be loyal to me? Don't you think I am man enough to be worth sticking to if I have no hands? [*Threatening.*] You have got to stick to me. What are you afraid of? We will go away together thousands of miles from here. Let me only see these dollars in here. On this table. Fetch that weight along now. [ANNE *rummages amongst a heap of things in the corner of the hut and comes forward with a seven-pound weight and a long piece of string.* M. W. H. *without looking at her.*] Got it?

ANNE. Yes.

M. W. H. The right stump, of course. [*Presents it.*] Lash it on properly too. It wouldn't do for it to come off. [ANNE *begins to fasten the weight with the piece of string.*] You see—a resolute man with a lump of iron like this at the end of his arm can crack three skulls long before the idiots with hands have time to pull out their revolvers. See? Especially if it is he who starts the scrimmage all of a sudden. I reckon there will be precious little sharing of those dollars. We will have the lot. Make a proper knot. Done it?

ANNE. Yes.

M. W. H. [*swinging his arm*]. Good. [*Puts the stump in his pocket and throws the other arm over* ANNE'S

shoulder.] You are the only one with a backbone. A poor, miserable, helpless, godforsaken cripple like me wants a companion for always . . . and you are the one. [ANNE *wriggles free from his arm and returns to the child.* M. W. H. *listens.*]

FECTOR [*voice outside*]. After you, Captain. We have been out for a breath of air. Isn't it hot though? [DAVIDSON *enters room with a spirit kettle in one hand and some sort of little box containing medicines.*]

M. W. H. [*who at first sound of voices had thrown himself back into his chair, to* DAVIDSON]. Isn't it unfortunate about that poor child?

DAVIDSON [*with meaning*]. Yes, and for the woman too.

M. W. H. A mother's feelings, of course. But I can't stand seeing a child suffer. I can't bear it. But what could I do, a poor cripple! I couldn't smooth the pillow of a dying friend. How lucky you turned up, just in the nick of time. Did they expect you? I was never so surprised in my life.

DAVIDSON [*who has stopped to listen*]. Not so much as I am. [*Passes into the other room.*]

FECTOR [*who with the other two, has been standing in the doorway*]. The night's as black as the inside of a cow. [*All three approach the table.*]

M. W. H. Did you make sure how the gangway is laid?

NAKHODA [*fatuous tone*]. Yes. There's a double plank. It will be quite easy for you.

M. W. H. Shut up, you idiot. [*The other subsides with a complacent smile.*] Come on, sit down, let's pretend to play cards or do some damned thing or

other. [*They sit down, take up cards, but look nervous, distracted and jumpy.*]

DAVIDSON [*in the other room, to* ANNE]. Here are some matches. I brought you a candle too. Light it, Anne. We will boil that kettle. [*Changed tone.*] So they came here to wait for the ship and rob her. It's the hardest thing to believe in I ever ran against in my life. [*Incredulous.*] They can't mean it.

ANNE. They mean it right enough and that man without hands has got pluck enough for the lot of them. [*She busies herself in lighting the lamp under the kettle and giving some medicine out of a spoon to the child.*] They think you are soft, Davy, ha—ha—ha. [*Laughs.*]

DAVIDSON [*sitting on a keg by the side of the cot, looking up*]. I don't know about being soft, but I know that if trouble comes I will be alone. I am the only white man on board and you know what those kalashes are. At the sound of the first shot all my crew will bolt ashore. I know them well. However, all this sounds like a fairy tale. A vile sort of fairy tale.

ANNE. Oh, Davy, they've been talking before me. [*A moan from the child.* ANNE *bending over cot.*] All right, Tony, Mama will give you a drink soon, a nice sweet drink. [*To* DAVIDSON.] Poor kid. There's nothing in life for such as he. Not a dog's chance. But I couldn't let him go, Davy, I couldn't let him go. No! No!

DAVIDSON. Steady, Anne. [*Looking at child.*] Feel him, he is less hot, he will soon be better.

ANNE [*seizing suddenly* DAVIDSON'S *arm for emphasis*]. Be careful of that devil without hands, Davy.

DAVIDSON. Well, he may be a devil, but without hands he can't do much, can he?

ANNE [*impressive*]. Mind you don't let him come near you, that's all. [*Hesitates.*] Listen. The others don't know, but he has made me tie a seven-pound weight on to his right stump. Do you understand?

DAVIDSON [*low whistle of astonishment*]. I see. H'm. All this seems more and more incredible. However . . .

ANNE. Davy, you may expect to see them crawling on board your ship about midnight to steal, to murder perhaps.

DAVIDSON [*discreetly*]. I had better get on board and get ready for the visitors. If they do come.

ANNE. It's no joking matter, Davy. I will come outside the hut with them when they start and it will be hard luck if I don't find occasion for a laugh. They are used to that from me. Laugh or cry, what's the odds. You will be able to hear me on board this quiet night. . . . You won't go to sleep—will you?

DAVIDSON. I will try not to. [*Serious.*] Don't you run any risks for me. [*Pointing to the cot.*] Look, he will be all right. [ANNE *drops on her knees by the cot and gazes at the child while* DAVIDSON *passes into the other room.*]

FECTOR. What about a drink now, Captain?

DAVIDSON. Thanks, I think I will go on board now and turn in. The child is better. He is sleeping. Don't make more noise than you can help.

FECTOR. Oh, we are a quiet lot; and if the invalid gets worse one of us will run down to call you so that you may play doctor again, so don't shoot at sight.

NAKHODA [*fatuous tone*]. He hasn't the name of a shooting man.

DAVIDSON [*contemptuous*]. I never shoot without making sure there is a good reason for it. [*To* BAMTZ.] The boy will be all right.

BAMTZ [*nervous laugh*]. Poor little chap. Thank you, Captain; thank you, Captain.

[M. W. H. *gets up, keeping his stumps in his pockets and makes a bow which* DAVIDSON *returns with a nod. Exit* DAVIDSON.]

ACT II: Scene 2

DARKENED scene with, at the back and extending nearly across, the darker shape of Bamtz's *hut raised a little above level of the stage, with a very dim light showing the square of the doorway. To right, stern of a small ship with a gangway of two planks to the shore and a pair of mooring ropes to the stump of a tree in the foreground. On board, a hammock swung to a boom, with a mosquito net over it, and a bit of skylight, which is all that is shown of the ship on the stage, the rest being in the wings. A few bushes on the bank in which the wind makes a faint rustle. After the curtain has been up for some time the distant crowing of a cock is heard faintly. Again the bushes rustle. The dimly lit doorway in the distance is darkened four different times and* Anne's *characteristic laugh is heard very clear, but very faint. Then in the darkness of the stage four figures, noiseless, come stealing forward towards the plank gangway.*

Fector [*sibilant whisper*]. No murder. I have no mind to hang.

M. W. H. And suppose he resists?

Bamtz [*with chattering teeth*]. He w-w-w-on't.

Nakhoda [*scared voice*]. He's not a shooting man.

M. W. H. Get on board, you skunks.

[*The business of getting on board should be conducted with every appearance of stealth.* Fector, *as the most agile, runs suddenly up without noise, gets on deck, passes on in wing. Next* Nakhoda

crawls up by starts. As to BAMTZ, *he hangs back and even resists a push from* M. W. H. *at first.*]

BAMTZ [*whispers*]. No murder.

M. W. H. You damned coward. I will do the murdering, if necessary. Get up. Don't drop the crowbar. [BAMTZ *proceeds up the gangway on all fours, and sliding past the hammock follows the others into the wing out of sight. Then* M. W. H. *follows with deliberate noiseless pace, step by step, and once on deck stands by the hammock, on watch. A light appears very dimly in the bit of skylight that is visible on the stage and a cracking sound is heard as if some one has been prising open a door.* M. W. H. *makes one step forward towards hammock. Another crack. Takes another step, mutters wildly*]. Why not make sure! [*By-play representing ferocious irresistible impulse. Swings stump up with weight and brings it down on the hammock where the head should be, also throwing himself with a savage grunt upon it, so that hammock collapses under him and is seen to be empty,* M. W. H. *getting a bad fall, jumps up in dismay, yells*]: Treason, treason! [*Dashes over the gangway on the bank yelling*]: We have been sold. Look out for yourselves. [*Shots are heard in the wing.*] Kill him, kill him! [*The three others follow in a panic, falling over each other while* DAVIDSON *fires repeatedly, and in a confusion and flashes of shots and screams of pain they leap on shore and vanish completely from sight while* DAVIDSON *stands aft, the only person visible to the audience now.* DAVIDSON *has a revolver in each hand, he throws down the empty one, peers into the darkness from which there are sounds of moans and a shout from* M. W. H.] It's that damned woman that has given us away. Where are you, you damned cowards! Ha! [M. W. H. *dimly seen for a moment disappears in direction of hut.*]

DAVIDSON [*slapping his forehead*]. My God, poor Anne. [*He goes ashore, and stands irresolute in the darkness. Starts at a shriek to the left, and the faintest appearance of the running figure of* ANNE. *Makes irresolute step to right. Shriek behind him. Spins round on his heel. Then at the back of stage there must be just enough light to show* M. W. H. *cutting off* ANNE *who is trying to run into the house. They vanish again. A long shriek, cut dead short.*] Run on board, Anne. [*Silence.* DAVIDSON *makes a step or two when the shadow of* M. W. H. *jumps up from the ground and vanishes and* DAVIDSON *stumbles over the body of* ANNE *lying on her face. All the time he must convey by his action that he is in mortal terror of something jumping on him in the dark. Kneels.*] Anne, Anne. [*Tries to lift her.*]

ANNE [*weak voice*]. He knocked me over. Never mind me. The kid. Get the kid out, Davy. [*Moan.* DAVIDSON *makes a step forward towards the house, spins round at an imaginary sound behind him. For a moment his heart fails him and he makes a motion as if to get back on board, then suddenly pulls himself together and with one hand extended and his head over his shoulder all the time paces stiffly on towards the dim light at back of stage and goes within. Directly he vanishes out of the light the vague form of* M. W. H. *appears running, stops, muttering:* I must finish that job. *Stoops, feels over the ground for* ANNE'S *body, squats over it, lifting the stump with the weight. The dim square of light in hut vanishes and directly afterwards the faint voice of child is heard calling:* Mama, Mama!]

DAVIDSON. Be quiet, Tony. [*His form carrying the child on his left arm and whispering again:* Be quiet, Tony, *comes into view. As he approaches the hardly*

seen figure of M. W. H. *squatting over* ANNE, M. W. H. *jumps up.* DAVIDSON *fires. The child whimpers.*]

M. W. H. Damn his soul! He's got me. [*Deep groan, falls.*]

DAVIDSON [*advances, feeling with his foot for* ANNE, *then, with his left hand pressing the child's head to his shoulder, he kneels down and in a low voice says*]: Anne. [*He picks up her hand. The boy in a stifled voice whimpers:* Mama. DAVIDSON *drops* ANNE'S *hand, which falls lifeless, and moves on toward the ship, shouting*]: On deck there! On deck! Serang!

SERANG'S VOICE. Ya, Tuan.

DAVIDSON. Bring a lantern. Here, take the child. [*Hands child over rail.*] You curs, where have you been hiding? All of you cleared out, eh?

SERANG. They frightened. All back on board now, Tuan.

DAVIDSON [*to* SERANG *on board*]. Send four men ashore. There is a dead body there which we are going to take out to sea. [*He moves, carrying the lantern low, followed by four Malays in blue dungaree suits, dark faces. Stands the lantern on the ground by the body and looking down at it apostrophizes the corpse.*] Poor Anne! You are on my conscience, but your boy shall have his chance.

[*As the kalashes stoop to lift up the body* CURTAIN *falls.*]

ONE DAY MORE

CHARACTERS

CAPTAIN HAGBERD: A retired coasting skipper.

JOSIAH CARVIL: Formerly a shipbuilder—a widower —blind.

HARRY HAGBERD: Son of CAPTAIN HAGBERD, who, as a boy, ran away from home.

A LAMPLIGHTER.

BESSIE CARVIL: Daughter of JOSIAH CARVIL.

PLACE: A small sea-port.

TIME: The present—early autumn, towards dusk.

STAGE REPRESENTS: To right—two yellow brick cottages belonging to CAPTAIN HAGBERD, one is inhabited by himself, the other by the CARVILS, A lamp-post in front. The red roofs of the town in the background. A sea-wall to left.

Note.—The division into scenes is made in a purely dramatic sense. It has nothing to do with the scenery. It relates only to the varied grouping of the characters with the consequent changes into the mental and emotional atmosphere of the situation.

ONE DAY MORE

ONE DAY MORE

SCENE I

CURTAIN rises disclosing CARVIL *and* BESSIE *moving away from sea-wall.* BESSIE *about twenty-five. Black dress, black straw hat. A lot of mahogany-coloured hair loosely done up. Pale face. Full figure. Very quiet.* CARVIL, *blind, unwieldy. Reddish whiskers; slow, deep voice produced without effort. Immovable, big face.*

CARVIL [*hanging heavily on* BESSIE'S *arm*]. Careful! Go slow! [*Stops;* BESSIE *waits patiently.*] Want your poor blind father to break his neck? [*Shuffles on.*] In a hurry to get home and start that everlasting yarn with your chum the lunatic?

BESSIE. I am not in a hurry to get home, Father.

CARVIL. Well, then, go steady with a poor blind man. Blind! Helpless! [*Strikes the ground with his stick.*] Never mind! I've had time to make enough money to have ham and eggs for breakfast every morning—thank God! And thank God, too, for it, girl. You haven't known a single hardship in all the days of your idle life. Unless you think that a blind, helpless father——

BESSIE. What is there for me to be in a hurry for?

CARVIL. What did you say?

BESSIE. I said there was nothing for me to hurry home for.

CARVIL. There is, tho'. To yarn with a lunatic. Anything to get away from your duty.

BESSIE. Captain Hagberd's talk never hurt you or anybody else.

CARVIL. Go on. Stick up for your only friend.

BESSIE. Is it my fault that I haven't another soul to speak to?

CARVIL [*snarls*]. It's mine, perhaps. Can I help being blind? You fret because you want to be gadding about—with a helpless man left all alone at home. Your own father, too.

BESSIE. I haven't been away from you half a day since Mother died.

CARVIL [*viciously*]. He's a lunatic, our landlord is. That's what he is. Has been for years—long before those damned doctors destroyed my sight for me. [*Growls angrily, then sighs.*]

BESSIE. Perhaps Captain Hagberd is not so mad as the town takes him for.

CARVIL [*grimly*]. Don't everybody know how he came here from the North to wait till his missing son turns up—here—of all places in the world. His boy that ran away to sea sixteen years ago and never did give a sign of life since! Don't I remember seeing people dodge round corners out of his way when he came along High Street. Seeing him, I tell you. [*Groan.*] He bothered everybody so with his silly talk of his son being sure to come back home—next year—next spring—next month—— What is it by this time, hey?

BESSIE. Why talk about it? He bothers no one now.

CARVIL. No. They've grown too fly. You've got only to pass a remark on his sail-cloth coat to make him shut up. All the town knows it. But he's got you to listen to his crazy talk whenever he chooses. Don't I hear you two at it, jabber, jabber, mumble, mumble——

BESSIE. What is there so mad in keeping up hope?

CARVIL [*scathing scorn*]. Not mad! Starving himself to lay money by—for that son. Filling his house with furniture he won't let any one see—for that son. Advertising in the papers every week, these sixteen years—for that son. Not mad!" "Boy," he calls him, "Boy Harry." His boy Harry. His lost boy Harry. Yah! Let him lose his sight to know what real trouble means. And the boy—the man, I should say—must've been put away safe in Davy Jones's locker for many a year—drowned—food for fishes—dead. . . . Stands to reason, or he would have been here before, smelling around the old fool's money. [*Shakes* BESSIE's *arm slightly.*] Hey?

BESSIE. I don't know. Maybe.

CARVIL [*bursting out*]. Damme if I don't think he ever had a son.

BESSIE. Poor man. Perhaps he never had.

CARVIL. Ain't that mad enough for you? But I suppose you think it sensible.

BESSIE. What does it matter? His talk keeps him up.

CARVIL. Aye! And it pleases you. Anything to get away from your poor blind father . . . Jabber, jabber—mumble, mumble—till I begin to think you

must be as crazy as he is. What do you find to talk about, you two? What's your game?

[*During the scene* CARVIL *and* BESSIE *have crossed stage from L. to R. slowly with stoppages.*]

BESSIE. It's warm. Will you sit out for a while?

CARVIL [*viciously*]. Yes, I will sit out. [*Insistent.*] But what can be your game? What are you up to? [*They pass through garden gate.*] Because if it's his money you are after——

BESSIE. Father! How can you!

CARVIL [*disregarding her*]. To make you independent of your poor blind father, then you are a fool. [*Drops heavily on seat.*] He's too much of a miser to ever make a will—even if he weren't mad.

BESSIE. Oh! It never entered my head. I swear it never did.

CARVIL. Never did. Hey! Then you are a still bigger fool. . . . I want to go to sleep! [*Takes off his hat, drops it on ground, and leans his head back against the wall.*]

BESSIE. And I have been a good daughter to you. Won't you say that for me?

CARVIL [*very distinctly*]. I want—to—go—to—sleep. I'm tired. [*Closes his eyes.*]

[*During the scene* CAPTAIN HAGBERD *has been seen hesitating at the back of stage, then running quickly to the door of his cottage. He puts inside a tin kettle—from under his coat—and comes down to the railing between the two gardens, stealthily.*]

SCENE II

CARVIL *seated.* BESSIE. CAPTAIN HAGBERD *white beard, sail-cloth jacket.*

BESSIE [*knitting*]. You've been out this afternoon for quite a long time, haven't you?

CAPT. HAGBERD [*eager*]. Yes, my dear. [*Slyly.*] Of course you saw me come back.

BESSIE. Oh, yes. I did see you. You had something under your coat.

CAPT. H. [*anxiously*]. It was only a kettle, my dear. A tin water-kettle. I am glad I thought of it just in time. [*Winks, nods.*] When a husband gets back from his work he needs a lot of water for a wash. See? [*Dignified.*] Not that Harry'll ever need to do a hand's turn after he comes home . . . [*Falters—casts stealthy glances on all sides*] . . . to-morrow.

BESSIE [*looks up, grave*]. Captain Hagberd, have you ever thought that perhaps your son will not . . .

CAPT. H. [*paternally*]. I've thought of everything, my dear—of everything a reasonable young couple may need for housekeeping. Why, I can hardly turn about in my room up there, the house is that full. [*Rubs his hands with satisfaction.*] For my son Harry—when he comes home. One day more.

BESSIE [*flattering*]. Oh, you are a great one for bargains. [CAPT H., *delighted.*] But Captain Hagberd—if—if—you don't know what may happen—if all that

home you've got together were to be wasted—for nothing—after all. [*Aside.*] Oh, I can't bring it out.

CAPT. H. [*agitated; flings arms up, stamps feet; stuttering*]. What? What d'ye mean? What's going to happen to the things?

BESSIE [*soothing*]. Nothing! Nothing! Dust—or moth—you know. Damp, perhaps. You never let any one into the house . . .

CAPT. H. Dust! Damp! [*Has a throaty, gurgling laugh.*] I light the fires and dust the things myself. [*Indignant.*] Let any one into the house, indeed! What would Harry say! [*Walks up and down his garden hastily with tosses, flings, and jerks of his whole body.*]

BESSIE [*with authority*]. Now, then, Captain Hagberd! You know I won't put up with your tantrums. [*Shakes finger at him.*]

CAPT. H. [*subdued, but still sulky, with his back to her*]. You want to see the things. That's what you're after. Well, no, not even you. Not till Harry has had his first look.

BESSIE. Oh, no! I don't. [*Relenting.*] Not till you're willing. [*Smiles at* CAPT. H., *who has turned half round already.*] You mustn't excite yourself. [*Knits.*]

CAPT. H. [*condescending*]. And you the only sensible girl for miles and miles around. Can't you trust me? I am a domestic man. Always was, my dear. I hated the sea. People don't know what they let their boys into when they send them to sea. As soon make convicts of them at once. What sort of life is it? Most of your time you don't know what's going on at home. [*Insinuating.*] There's nothing anywhere on earth as

good as a home, my dear. [*Pause.*] With a good husband . . .

CARVIL [*heard from his seat, fragmentarily*]. There they go . . . jabber, jabber . . . mumble, mumble. [*With a groaning effort.*] Helpless! [BESSIE *has glanced round at him.*]

CAPT. H. [*mutters*]. Extravagant ham-and-eggs fellow. [*Louder.*] Of course it isn't as if he had a son to make a home ready for. Girls are different, my dear. They don't run away, my dear, my dear. [*Agitated.*]

BESSIE [*drops her arms, wearily*]. No, Captain Hagberd—they don't.

CAPT. H. [*slowly*]. I wouldn't let my own flesh and blood go to sea. Not I.

BESSIE. And the boy ran away.

CAPT. H. [*a little vacantly*]. Yes, my only son Harry. [*Rouses himself.*] Coming home to-morrow.

BESSIE [*looks at him pityingly; speaks softly*]. Sometimes, Captain Hagberd, a hope turns out false.

CAPT. H. [*uneasy*]. What's that got to do with Harry's coming back?

BESSIE. It's good to hope for something. But suppose now—— [*Feeling her way.*] Yours is not the only lost son that's never . . .

CAPT. H. Never what? You don't believe he's drowned? [*Crouches, glaring and grasping the rails.*]

BESSIE [*frightened, drops knitting*]. Captain Hagberd —don't. [*Catches hold of his shoulders over the railings.*] Don't—my God! he's going out of his mind! [*Cries.*] I didn't mean it! I don't know.

CAPT. H. [*has backed away. An affected burst of laughter*]. What nonsense! None of us Hagberds belonged to the sea. All farmers for hundreds of years. [*Paternal and cunning.*] Don't alarm yourself, my dear. The sea can't get us. Look at me! I didn't get drowned. Moreover, Harry ain't a sailor at all. And if he isn't a sailor, he's bound to come back—tomorrow.

BESSIE [*has been facing him; murmurs*]. No. I give it up. He scares me. [*Aloud, sharply.*] Then I would give up that advertising in the papers.

CAPT. H. [*surprised and puzzled*]. Why, my dear? Everybody does it. His poor mother and I have been advertising for years and years. But she was an impatient woman. She died.

BESSIE. If your son's coming, as—as you say—what's the good of that expense? You had better spend that half-crown on yourself. I believe you don't eat enough.

CAPT. H. [*confused*]. But it's the right thing to do. Look at the Sunday papers. Missing relatives on top page—all proper. [*Looks unhappy.*]

BESSIE [*tartly*]. Ah, well! I declare I don't know what you live on.

CAPT. H. Are you getting impatient, my dear? Don't get impatient—like my poor wife. If she'd only been patient she'd be here. Waiting—only one day more. [*Pleadingly.*] Don't be impatient, my dear.

BESSIE. I've no patience with you sometimes.

CAPT. H. [*flash of lucidity*]. Why? What's the matter? [*Sympathetic.*] You're tired out, my dear, that's what it is.

BESSIE. Yes, I am. Day after day. [*Stands listless, arms hanging down.*]

CAPT. H. [*timidly*]. House dull?

BESSIE [*apathetic*]. Yes.

CAPT. H. [*as before*]. H'm. Wash, cook, scrub. Hey?

BESSIE [*as before*]. Yes.

CAPT. H. [*pointing stealthily at the sleeping* CARVIL]. Heavy?

BESSIE [*in a dead voice*]. Like a millstone.

[*A silence.*]

CAPT. H. [*burst of indignation*]. Why don't that extravagant fellow get you a servant?

BESSIE. I don't know.

CAPT. H. [*cheerily*]. Wait till Harry comes home. He'll get you one.

BESSIE [*almost hysterical: laughs*]. Why, Captain Hagberd, perhaps your son won't even want to look at me—when he comes home.

CAPT. H. [*in a great voice*]. What! [*Quite low.*] The boy wouldn't dare. [*Rising choler.*] Wouldn't dare to refuse the only sensible girl for miles around. That stubborn jackanapes refuse to marry a girl like you! [*Walks about in a fury.*] You trust me, my dear, my dear, my dear. I'll make him. I'll—I'll—— [*Splutters.*] Cut him off with a shilling.

BESSIE. Hush! [*Severe.*] You mustn't talk like that. What's this? More of your tantrums?

CAPT. H. [*quite humble*]. No, no—this isn't my tantrums—when I don't feel quite well in my head.

Only I can't stand this. . . . I've grown as fond of you as if you'd been the wife of my Harry already. And to be told—— [*Can't restrain himself, shouts.*] Jackanapes!

BESSIE. Sh——! Don't you worry! [*Wearily.*] I must give that up, too, I suppose. [*Aloud.*] I didn't mean it, Captain Hagberd.

CAPT. H. It's as if I were to have two children to-morrow. My son Harry—and the only sensible girl—— Why, my dear, I couldn't get on without you. We two are reasonable together. The rest of the people in the town are crazy. The way they stare at you. And the grins—they're all on the grin. It makes me dislike to go out. [*Bewildered.*] It seems as if there was something wrong about—somewhere. My dear, is there anything wrong—you who are sensible . . .

BESSIE [*soothingly tender*]. No, no, Captain Hagberd. There is nothing wrong about you anywhere.

CARVIL [*lying back*]. Bessie! [*Sits up.*] Get my hat, Bessie. . . . Bessie, my hat. . . . Bessie . . . Bessie . . . [*At the first sound* BESSIE *picks up and puts away her knitting. She walks towards him, picks up hat, puts it on his head.*] Bessie my . . . [*Hat on head: shouting stops.*]

BESSIE [*quietly*]. Will you go in, now?

CARVIL. Help me up. Steady. I'm dizzy. It's the thundery weather. An autumn thunderstorm means a bad gale. Very fierce—and sudden. There will be shipwrecks to-night on our coast.

[*Exit* BESSIE *and* CARVIL *through door of their cottage. It has fallen dusk.*]

CAPT. H. [*picks up spade*]. Extravagant fellow! And all this town is mad—perfectly mad. I found them out years ago. Thank God they don't come this way staring and grinning. I can't bear them. I'll never go again into that High Street. [*Agitated.*] Never, never, never. Won't need to, after to-morrow. Never! [*Flings down spade in a passion.*]

[*While* HAGBERD *speaks, the bow window of the* CARVILS *is lit up, and* BESSIE *is seen settling her father in a big armchair. Pulls down blind. Enter* LAMPLIGHTER. CAPT. H. *picks up the spade and leans forward on it with both hands; very still, watching him light the lamp.*]

LAMPLIGHTER [*jocular*]. There! You will be able to dig by lamplight if the fancy takes you.

[*Exit* LAMPLIGHTER *to back.*]

CAPT. H. [*disgusted*]. Ough! The people here . . . [*Shudders.*]

LAMPLIGHTER'S VOICE [*heard loudly beyond the cottages*]. Yes, that's the way.

[*Enter* HARRY *from back.*]

SCENE III

CAPT. HAGBERD. HARRY. *Later*, BESSIE.

HARRY HAGBERD [*thirty-one, tall, broad shoulders, shaven face, small moustache. Blue serge suit. Coat open. Grey flannel shirt without collar and tie. No waistcoat. Belt with buckle. Black, soft felt hat, wide-brimmed, worn crushed in the crown and a little on one side. Good nature, recklessness, some swagger in the bearing. Assured, deliberate walk with a heavy tread. Slight roll in the gait. Walks down. Stops, hands in pockets. Looks about. Speaks*]. This must be it. Can't see anything beyond. There's somebody. [*Walks up to* CAPT. H.'s *gate.*] Can you tell me . . . [*Manner changes. Leans elbow on gate.*] Why, you must be Captain Hagberd himself.

CAPT. H. [*in garden, both hands on spade, peering, startled*]. Yes, I am.

HARRY [*slowly*]. You've been advertising in the papers for your son, I believe.

CAPT. H. [*off his guard, nervous*]. Yes. My only boy Harry. He's coming home to-morrow. [*Mumbles.*] For a permanent stay.

HARRY [*surprised*]. The devil he is! [*Change of tone.*] My word! You've grown a beard like Father Christmas himself.

CAPT. H. [*impressively*]. Go your way. [*Waves one hand loftily.*] What's that to you? Go your way. [*Agitated.*] Go your way.

HARRY. There, there. I am not trespassing in the street—where I stand—am I? Tell you what, I fancy there's something wrong about your nerves. Suppose you let me come in—for a quiet chat, you know.

CAPT. H. [*horrified*]. Let you—*you* come in!

HARRY [*persuasive*]. Because I could give you some real information about your son. The—very—latest—tip. If you care to hear.

CAPT. H. [*explodes*]. No! I don't care to hear. [*Begins to pace to and fro, spade on shoulder. Gesticulating with his other arm.*] Here's a fellow—a grinning town fellow, who says there's something wrong. [*Fiercely.*] I have got more information than you're aware of. I have all the information I want. I have had it for years—for years—for years—enough to last me till to-morrow! Let you come in, indeed! What would Harry say?

[BESSIE CARVIL *enters at cottage door with a white wrap on her head and stands in her garden trying to see.*]

BESSIE. What's the matter?

CAPT. H. [*beside himself*]. An information fellow. [*Stumbles.*]

HARRY [*putting out arm to steady him, gravely*]. Here! Steady a bit! Seems to me somebody's been trying to get at you. [*Change of tone.*] Hullo! What's this rig you've got on? . . . Storm canvas coat, by George! [*He gives a big, throaty laugh.*] Well! You *are* a character!

CAPT. H. [*daunted by the allusion, looks at coat*]. I—I wear it for—for the time being. Till—till—to-morrow. [*Shrinks away, spade in hand, to door of his cottage.*]

BESSIE [*advancing*]. And what may you want, sir?

HARRY [*turns to* BESSIE *at once; easy manner*]. I'd like to know about this swindle that's going to be sprung on him. I didn't mean to startle the old man. You see, on my way here I dropped into a barber's to get a twopenny shave, and they told me there that he was something of a character. He has been a character all his life.

BESSIE [*very low, wondering*]. What swindle?

CAPT. H. A grinning fellow! [*Makes sudden dash indoors with the spade. Door slams. Lock clicks. Affected gurgling laugh within.*]

SCENE IV

BESSIE *and* HARRY. *Later,* CAPT. HAGBERD *from window.*

HARRY [*after a short silence*]. What on earth's upset him so? What's the meaning of all this fuss? He isn't always like that, is he?

BESSIE. I don't know who you are; but I may tell you that his mind has been troubled for years about an only son who ran away from home—a long time ago. Everybody knows that here.

HARRY [*thoughtful*]. Troubled—for years! [*Suddenly.*] Well, I am the son.

BESSIE [*steps back*]. You! . . . Harry!

HARRY [*amused, dry tone*]. Got hold of my name, eh? Been making friends with the old man?

BESSIE [*distressed*]. Yes . . . I . . . sometimes . . . [*Rapidly.*] He's our landlord.

HARRY [*scornfully*]. Owns both them rabbit hutches, does he? Just a thing he'd be proud of. . . . [*Earnest.*] And now you had better tell me all about that chap who's coming to-morrow. Know anything of him? I reckon there's more than one in that little game. Come! Out with it! [*Chaffing.*] I don't take no . . . from women.

BESSIE [*bewildered*]. Oh! It's so difficult . . . What had I better do?

HARRY [*good humoured*]. Make a clean breast of it.

BESSIE [*wildly, to herself*]. Impossible! [*Starts.*] You don't understand. I must think—see—try to—I, I must have time. Plenty of time.

HARRY. What for? Come. Two words. And don't be afraid for yourself. I ain't going to make it a police job. But it's the other fellow that'll get upset when he least expects it. There'll be some fun when he shows his mug here to-morrow. [*Snaps fingers.*] I don't care that for the old man's dollars, but right is right. You shall see me put a head on that coon, whoever he is.

BESSIE [*wrings hands slightly*]. What had I better do? [*Suddenly to* HARRY.] It's you—you yourself that we —that he's waiting for. It's *you* who are to come to-morrow.

HARRY [*slowly*]. Oh! it's me! [*Perplexed.*] There's something there I can't understand. I haven't written ahead or anything. It was my chum who showed me the advertisement with the old boy's address, this very morning—in London.

BESSIE [*anxious*]. How can I make it plain to you without . . . [*Bites her lip, embarrassed.*] Sometimes he talks so strangely.

HARRY [*expectant*]. Does he? What about?

BESSIE. Only you. And he will stand no contradicting.

HARRY [*stubborn*]. Eh? The old man hasn't changed much from what I can remember. [*They stand looking at each other helplessly.*]

BESSIE. He's made up his mind you would come back . . . to-morrow.

HARRY. I can't hang about here till morning. Got no money to get a bed. Not a cent. But why won't to-day do?

BESSIE. Because you've been too long away.

HARRY [*with force*]. Look here, they fairly drove me out. Poor mother nagged at me for being idle, and the old man said he would cut my soul out of my body rather than let me go to sea.

BESSIE [*murmurs*]. He can bear no contradicting.

HARRY [*continuing*]. Well, it looked as tho' he would do it, too. So I went. [*Moody.*] It seems to me sometimes I was born to them by a mistake . . . in that other rabbit hutch of a house.

BESSIE [*a little mocking*]. And where do you think you ought to have been born by rights?

HARRY. In the open—upon a beach—on a windy night.

BESSIE [*faintly*]. Ah!

HARRY. They were characters, both of them, by George! Shall I try the door?

BESSIE. Wait. I must explain to you why it is to-morrow.

HARRY. Aye. That you must, or . . .

[*Window in* H.'s *cottage runs up.*]

CAPT. H.'S VOICE [*above*]. A—grinning—information—fellow coming to worry me in my own garden! What next?

[*Window rumbles down.*]

BESSIE. Yes. I must. [*Lays hand on* HARRY's *sleeve.*] Let's get further off. Nobody ever comes this way after dark.

HARRY [*careless laugh*]. Aye. A good road for a walk with a girl.

[*They turn their backs on audience and move up the stage, slowly. Close together.* HARRY *bends his head over* BESSIE.]

BESSIE'S VOICE [*beginning eagerly*]. People here somehow did not take kindly to him.

HARRY'S VOICE. Aye. Aye. I understand that.

[*They walk slowly back towards the front.*]

BESSIE. He was almost ready to starve himself for your sake.

HARRY. And I had to starve more than once for his whim.

BESSIE. I'm afraid you've a hard heart. [*Remains thoughtful.*]

HARRY. What for? For running away? [*Indignant.*] Why, he wanted to make a blamed lawyer's clerk of me.

[*From here this scene goes on mainly near and about the street lamp.*

BESSIE [*rousing herself*]. What are you? A sailor?

HARRY. Anything you like. [*Proudly.*] Sailor enough to be worth my salt on board any craft that swims the seas.

BESSIE. He will never, never believe it. He mustn't be contradicted.

HARRY. Always liked to have his own way. And you've been encouraging him.

BESSIE [*earnestly*]. No!—not in everything—not really!

HARRY [*vexed laugh*]. What about that pretty to-morrow notion? I've a hungry chum in London—waiting for me.

BESSIE [*defending herself*]. Why should I make the poor old friendless man miserable? I thought you were far away. I thought you were dead. I didn't know but you had never been born. I . . . I . . . [HARRY *turns to her. She desperately.*] It was easier to believe it myself. [*Carried away.*] And after all it's true. It's come to pass. This is the to-morrow we've been waiting for.

HARRY [*half perfunctorily*]. Aye. Anybody can see that your heart is as soft as your voice.

BESSIE [*as if unable to keep back the words*]. I didn't think you would have noticed my voice.

HARRY [*already inattentive*]. H'm. Dashed scrape. This is a queer to-morrow, without any sort of to-day, as far as I can see. [*Resolutely.*] I must try the door.

BESSIE. Well—try, then.

HARRY [*from gate looking over shoulder at* BESSIE]. He ain't likely to fly out at me, is he? I would be afraid of laying my hands on him. The chaps are always telling me I don't know my own strength.

BESSIE [*in front*]. He's the most harmless creature that ever . . .

HARRY. You wouldn't say so if you had seen him walloping me with a hard leather strap. [*Walking up*

garden.] I haven't forgotten it in sixteen long years. [*Rat-tat-tat, twice.*] Hullo, Dad. [BESSIE *intensely expectant. Rat-tat-tat.*] Hullo, Dad, let me in. I am your own Harry. Straight. Your son Harry come back home—a day too soon.

[*Window above rumbles up.*]

CAPT. H. [*seen leaning out, aiming with spade*]. Aha!

BESSIE [*warningly*]. Look out, Harry! [*Spade falls.*] Are you hurt?

[*Window rumbles down.*]

HARRY [*in the distance*]. Only grazed my hat.

BESSIE. Thank God! [*Intensely.*] What'll he do now?

HARRY [*comes forward, slamming gate behind him*]. Just like old times. Nearly licked the life out of me for wanting to go away, and now I come back he shies a confounded old shovel at my head. [*Fumes. Laughs a little.*] I wouldn't care, only poor little Ginger—Ginger's my chum up in London—he will starve while I walk back all the way from here. [*Faces* BESSIE *blankly.*] I spent my last two-pence on a shave . . . Out of respect for the old man.

BESSIE. I think, if you let me, I could manage to talk him round in a week, maybe. [*A muffled periodical bellowing has been heard faintly for some time.*]

HARRY [*on the alert*]. What's this? Who's making this row? Hark! Bessie, Bessie. It's in your house, I believe.

BESSIE [*without stirring, drearily*]. It's for me.

HARRY [*discreetly, whispering*]. Good voice for a ship's deck in a squall. Your husband? [*Steps out of lamplight.*]

BESSIE. No. My father. He's blind. [*Pause.*] I'm not married.

[*Bellowings grow louder.*]

HARRY. Oh, I say. What's up? Who's murdering him?

BESSIE [*calmly*]. I expect he's finished his tea. [*Bellowing continues regularly.*]

HARRY. Hadn't you better see to it? You'll have the whole town coming out here presently. [BESSIE *moves off.*] I say! [BESSIE *stops.*] Couldn't you scare up some bread and butter for me from that tea? I'm hungry. Had no breakfast.

BESSIE [*starts off at the word "hungry," dropping to the ground the white woollen shawl*]. I won't be a minute. Don't go away.

HARRY [*alone; picks up shawl absently, and, looking at it spread out in his hands, pronounces slowly*]. A—dam'—silly—scrape. [*Pause. Throws shawl on arm. Strolls up and down. Mutters.*] No money to get back. [*Louder.*] Silly little Ginger'll think I've got hold of the pieces and given an old shipmate the go by. One good shove—[*makes motion of bursting in door with his shoulders*]—would burst that door in—I bet. [*Looks about.*] I wonder where the nearest bobby is? No. They would want to bundle me neck and crop into chokey. [*Shudders.*] Perhaps. It makes me dog sick to think of being locked up. Haven't got the nerve. Not for prison. [*Leans against lamp-post.*] And not a cent for my fare. I wonder if that girl now . . .

BESSIE [*coming hastily forward, plate with bread and meat in hand*]. I didn't take time to get anything else.

HARRY [*begins to eat*]. You're not standing treat to a beggar. My dad is a rich man—you know.

BESSIE [*plate in hand*]. You resemble your father.

HARRY. I was the very image of him in face from a boy—[*Eats*]—and that's about as far as it goes. He was always one of your domestic characters. He looked sick when he had to go to sea for a fortnight's trip. [*Laughs.*] He was all for house and home.

BESSIE. And you? Have you never wished for a home? [*Goes off with empty plate and puts it down hastily on* CARVIL'S *bench—out of sight.*]

HARRY [*left in front*]. Home! If I found myself shut up in what the old man calls a home, I would kick it down about my ears on the third day—or else go to bed and die before the week was out. Die in a house—ough!

BESSIE [*returning; stops and speaks from garden railing*]. And where is it that you would wish to die?

HARRY. In the bush, in the sea, on some blamed mountain-top for choice. No such luck, tho', I suppose.

BESSIE [*from distance*]. Would that be luck?

HARRY. Yes! For them that make the whole world their home.

BESSIE [*comes forward shyly*]. The world's a cold home—they say.

HARRY [*a little gloomy*]. So it is. When a man's done for.

BESSIE. You see! [*Taunting.*] And a ship's not so very big after all.

HARRY. No. But the sea is great. And then what of the ship! You love her and leave her, Miss—Bessie's your name—isn't it? . . . I like that name.

BESSIE. You like my name! I wonder you remembered it. . . . That's why, I suppose.

HARRY [*slight swagger in voice*]. What's the odds! As long as a fellow has lived. And a voyage isn't a marriage—as we sailors say.

BESSIE. So you're not married—[*movement of* HARRY]—to any ship.

HARRY [*soft laugh*]. Ship! I've loved and left more of them than I can remember. I've been nearly everything you can think of but a tinker or a soldier; I've been a boundary rider; I've sheared sheep and humped my swag and harpooned a whale; I've rigged ships and skinned dead bullocks and prospected for gold—and turned my back on more money than the old man would have scraped together in his whole life.

BESSIE [*thoughtfully*]. I could talk him over in a week. . . .

HARRY [*negligently*]. I dare say you could. [*Joking.*] I don't know but what I could make shift to wait if you only promise to talk to me now and then. I've grown quite fond of your voice. I like a right woman's voice.

BESSIE [*averted head*]. Quite fond! [*Sharply.*] Talk! Nonsense! Much you'd care. [*Business-like.*] Of course I would have to, sometimes. . . . [*Thoughtful again.*] Yes. In a week—if—if only I knew you would try to get on with him afterwards.

HARRY [*leaning against lamp-post; growls through his teeth*]. More humouring. Ah! well, no! [*Hums significantly.*]

Oh, oh, oh, Rio, . . .
And fare thee well
My bonnie young girl,
We're bound for Rio Grande.

BESSIE [*shivering*]. What's this?

HARRY. Why! The chorus of an up-anchor tune. Kiss and go. A deep-water ship's good-bye. . . . You are cold. Here's that thing of yours I've picked up and forgot there on my arm. Turn round a bit. So. [*Wraps her up—commanding.*] Hold the ends together in front.

BESSIE [*softly*]. A week is not so very long.

HARRY [*begins violently*]. You think that I——[*Stops with sidelong look at her.*] I can't dodge about in ditches and live on air and water. Can I? I haven't any money—you know.

BESSIE. He's been scraping and saving up for years. All he has is for you, and perhaps . . .

HARRY [*interrupts*]. Yes. If I come to sit on it like a blamed toad in a hole. Thank you.

BESSIE [*angrily*]. What did you come for, then?

HARRY [*promptly*]. For five quid—[*pause*]—after a jolly good spree.

BESSIE [*scathingly*]. You and that—that chum of yours have been drinking.

HARRY [*laughs*]. Don't fly out, Miss Bessie—dear. Ginger's not a bad little chap. Can't take care of himself, tho'. Blind three days. [*Serious.*] Don't

think I am given that way. Nothing and nobody can get over me unless I like. I can be as steady as a rock.

BESSIE [*murmurs*]. Oh! I don't think you are bad.

HARRY [*approvingly*]. You're right there. [*Impulsive.*] Ask the girls all over——[*Checks himself.*] Ginger, he's long-headed too, in his way—mind you. He sees the paper this morning, and says he to me, "Hallo! Look at that, Harry—loving parent—that's five quid, sure." So we scraped all our pockets for the fare. . . .

BESSIE [*unbelieving*]. You came here for that?

HARRY [*surprised*]. What else would I want here? Five quid isn't much to ask for—once in sixteen years. [*Through his teeth with a sidelong look at* B.] And now I am ready to go—for my fare.

BESSIE [*clasping her hands*]. Whoever heard a man talk like this before! I can't believe you mean it.

HARRY. What? That I would go? You just try and see.

BESSIE [*disregarding him*]. Don't you care for any one? Didn't you ever want any one in the world to care for you?

HARRY. In the world! [*Boastful.*] There's hardly a place you can go in the world where you wouldn't find somebody that did care for Harry Hagberd. [*Pause.*] I'm not of the sort that go about skulking under false names.

BESSIE. Somebody—that means a woman.

HARRY. Well! And if it did?

BESSIE [*unsteadily*]. Oh, I see how it is. You get round them with your soft speeches, your promises, and then . . .

HARRY [*violently*]. Never!

BESSIE [*startled, steps back*]. Ah—you never . . .

HARRY [*calm*]. Never yet told a lie to a woman.

BESSIE. What lie?

HARRY. Why, the lie that comes glib to a man's tongue. None of that for me. I leave the sneaking off to them soft-spoken chaps you're thinking of. No! If you love me you take me. And if you take me—why, then, the capstan-song of deep-water ships is sure to settle it all some fine day.

BESSIE [*after a short pause, with effort*]. It's like your ships, then.

HARRY [*amused*]. Exactly, up to now. Or else I wouldn't be here in a silly fix.

BESSIE [*assumed indifference*]. Perhaps it's because you've never yet met—— [*Voice fails.*]

HARRY [*negligently*]. Maybe. And perhaps never shall. . . . What's the odds? It's the looking for a thing. . . . No matter. I love them all—ships and women. The scrapes they got me into, and the scrapes they got me out of—my word! I say, Miss Bessie, what are you thinking of?

BESSIE [*lifts her head*]. That you are supposed never to tell a lie.

HARRY. Never, eh? You wouldn't be that hard on a chap.

BESSIE [*recklessly*]. Never to a woman, I mean.

HARRY. Well, no. [*Serious.*] Never anything that matters. [*Aside.*] I don't seem to get any nearer to my railway fare. [*Leans wearily against the lamp-post with a far-off look.* BESSIE *to L. looks at him.*]

BESSIE. Now what are *you* thinking of?

HARRY [*turns his head; stares at* B.]. Well, I was thinking what a fine figure of a girl you are.

BESSIE [*looks away a moment*]. Is that true, or is it only one of them that don't matter?

HARRY [*laughing a little*]. No! No! That's true. Haven't you ever been told that before? The men . . .

BESSIE. I hardly speak to a soul from year's end to year's end. Father's blind. He don't like strangers, and he can't bear to think of me out of his call. Nobody comes near us much.

HARRY [*absent-minded*]. Blind—ah! of course.

BESSIE. For years and years . . .

HARRY [*commiserating*]. For years and years. In one of them hutches. You are a good daughter. [*Brightening up.*] A fine girl altogether. You seem the sort that makes a good chum to a man in a fix. And there's not a man in this whole town who found you out? I can hardly credit it, Miss Bessie. [B. *shakes her head.*] Man, I said! [*Contemptuous.*] A lot of tame rabbits in hutches I call them. . . . [*Breaks off.*] I say, when's the last train up to London? Can you tell me?

BESSIE [*gazes at him steadily*]. What for? You've no money.

HARRY. That's just it. [*Leans back against post again.*] Hard luck. [*Insinuating.*] But there was never a time in all my travels that a woman of the right sort did not turn up to help me out of a fix. I don't know why. It's perhaps because they know without telling that I love them all. [*Playful.*] I've almost fallen in love with you, Miss Bessie.

BESSIE [*unsteady laugh*]. Why! How you talk! You haven't even seen my face properly. [*One step towards* HARRY, *as if compelled.*]

HARRY [*bending forward gallantly*]. A little pale. It suits some. [*Puts out his hand, catches hold of* B.'s *arm. Draws her to him.*] Let's see. . . . Yes, it suits you. [*It's a moment before* B. *puts up her hands, palms out, and turns away her head.*]

BESSIE [*whispering*]. Don't. [*Struggles a little. Released, stands averted.*]

HARRY. No offence. [*Stands, back to audience, looking at* CAPT. H.'S *cottage.*]

BESSIE [*alone in front; faces audience; whispers*]. My voice—my figure—my heart—my face. . . .

[*A silence.* B.'S *face gradually lights up. Directly* HARRY *speaks, expression of hopeful attention.*]

HARRY [*from railings*]. The old man seems to have gone to sleep waiting for that to-morrow of his.

BESSIE. Come away. He sleeps very little.

HARRY [*strolls down*]. He has taken an everlasting jamming hitch round the whole business. [*Vexed.*] Cast it loose who may. [*Contemptuous exclamation.*] To-morrow. Pooh! It'll be just another mad to-day.

BESSIE. It's the brooding over his hope that's done it. People teased him so. It's his fondness for you that's troubled his mind.

HARRY. Aye. A confounded shovel on the head. The old man had always a queer way of showing his fondness for me.

BESSIE. A hopeful, troubled, expecting old man—left alone—all alone.

HARRY [*lower tone*]. Did he ever tell you what Mother died of?

BESSIE. Yes. [*A little bitter.*] From impatience.

HARRY [*makes a gesture with his arm; speaks vaguely but with feeling*]. I believe you have been very good to my old man. . . .

BESSIE [*tentative*]. Wouldn't you try to be a son to him?

HARRY [*angrily*]. No contradicting; is that it? You seem to know my dad pretty well. And so do I. He's dead nuts on having his own way—and I've been used to have my own too long. It's the deuce of a fix.

BESSIE. How could it hurt you not to contradict him for a while—and perhaps in time you would get used . . .

HARRY [*interrupts sulkily*]. I ain't accustomed to knuckle under. There's a pair of us. Hagberds both. I ought to be thinking of my train.

BESSIE [*earnestly*]. Why? There's no need. Let us get away up the road a little.

HARRY [*through his teeth*]. And no money for the fare. [*Looks up.*] Sky's come overcast. Black, too. It'll be a wild, windy night . . . to walk the high-road on. But I and wild nights are old friends wherever the free wind blows.

BESSIE [*entreating*]. No need. No need. [*Looks apprehensively at* HAGBERD'S *cottage. Takes a couple of steps up as if to draw* HARRY *further off.* HARRY *follows. Both stop.*]

HARRY [*after waiting*]. What about this to-morrow whim?

BESSIE. Leave that to me. Of course all his fancies are not mad. They aren't. [*Pause.*] Most people in this town would think what he had set his mind on quite sensible. If he ever talks to you of it, don't contradict him. It would—it would be dangerous.

HARRY [*surprised*]. What would he do?

BESSIE. He would—I don't know—something rash.

HARRY [*startled*]. To himself?

BESSIE. No. It'd be against you—I fear.

HARRY [*sullen*]. Let him.

BESSIE. Never. Don't quarrel. But perhaps he won't even try to talk to you of it. [*Thinking aloud.*] Who knows what I can do with him in a week! I can, I can, I can—I must.

HARRY. Come—what's this sensible notion of his that I mustn't quarrel about?

BESSIE [*turns to* HARRY, *calm, forcible*]. If I make him once see that you've come back, he will be as sane as you or I. All his mad notions will be gone. But that other is quite sensible. And you mustn't quarrel over it.

[*Moves up to back of stage.* HARRY *follows a little behind, away from audience.*]

HARRY'S VOICE [*calm*]. Let's hear what it is.

[*Voices cease. Action visible as before.* HARRY *steps back and walks hastily down.* BESSIE, *at his elbow, follows with her hands clasped.*]

[*Loud burst of voice.*]

HARRY [*raving to and fro*]. No! Expects me—a home. Who wants his home? . . . What I want

is hard work, or an all-fired racket, or more room than there is in the whole of England. Expects me! A man like me—for his rotten money—there ain't enough money in the world to turn me into a blamed tame rabbit in a hutch. [*He stops suddenly before* BESSIE, *arms crossed on breast. Violently.*] Don't you see it?

BESSIE [*terrified, stammering faintly*]. Yes. Yes. Don't look at me like this. [*Sudden scream.*] Don't quarrel with him. He's mad!

HARRY [*headlong utterance*]. Mad! Not he. He likes his own way. Tie me up by the neck here. Here! Ha! Ha! Ha! [*Louder.*] And the whole world is not a bit too big for me to spread my elbows in, I can tell you—what's your name—Bessie. [*Rising scorn.*] Marry! Wants me to marry and settle. . . . [*Scathingly.*] And as likely as not he has looked out the girl, too—dash my soul. Talked to you about it—did he? And do you happen to know the Judy—may I ask?

[*Window in* CAPT. H.'S *cottage runs up. They start and stand still.*]

CAPT. H. [*above, begins slowly*]. A grinning information fellow from a crazy town. [*Voice changes.*] Bessie, I see you . . .

BESSIE [*shrilly*]. Captain Hagberd! Say nothing. You don't understand. For heaven's sake don't.

CAPT. H. Send him away this minute, or I will tell Harry. They know nothing of Harry in this crazy town. Harry's coming home to-morrow. Do you hear? One day more!

[*Silence.*]

HARRY [*mutters*]. Well!—he *is* a character.

CAPT. H. [*chuckles softly*]. Never you fear! The boy shall marry you. [*Sudden anger.*] He'll have to. I'll make him. Or, if not—[*Furious*]—I'll cut him off with a shilling, and leave everything to you. Jackanapes! Let him starve!

[*Window rumbles down.*]

HARRY [*slowly*]. So it's you—the girl. It's you! Now I begin to see. . . . By heavens, you have a heart as soft as your woman's voice.

BESSIE [*half averted, face in hands*]. You see! Don't come near me.

HARRY [*makes a step towards her*]. I must have another look at your pale face.

BESSIE [*turns unexpectedly and pushes him with both hands;* HARRY *staggers back and stands still; fiercely*]. Go away.

HARRY [*watching her*]. Directly. But women always had to get me out of my scrapes. I am a beggar now, and you must help me out of my scrape.

BESSIE [*who at the word "beggar" had begun fumbling in the pocket of her dress, speaks wildly*]. Here it is. Take it. Don't look at me. Don't speak to me!

HARRY [*swaggers up under the lamp: looks at coin in his palm*]. Half-a-quid . . . My fare!

BESSIE [*hands clenched*]. Why are you still here?

HARRY. Well, you *are* a fine figure of a girl. My word. I've a good mind to stop—for a week.

BESSIE [*pain and shame*]. Oh! . . . What are you waiting for? If I had more money I would give it all, all. I would give everything I have to make you

go—to make you forget you had ever heard my voice and seen my face. [*Covers face with hands.*]

HARRY [*sombre, watches her*]. No fear! I haven't forgotten a single one of you in the world. Some've given me more than money. No matter. You can't buy me in—and you can't buy yourself out . . .

[*Strides towards her. Seizes her arms. Short struggle.* BESSIE *gives way. Hair falls loose.* HARRY *kisses her forehead, cheeks, lips; then releases her.* BESSIE *staggers against railings.*]

[*Exit* HARRY; *measured walk without haste.*]

SCENE V

BESSIE. CAPT. HAGBERD *at window.*

BESSIE [*staring eyes, hair loose, back against railings; calls out*]: Harry! [*Gathers up her skirts and runs a little way.*] Come back, Harry. [*Staggers forward against lamp-post.*] Harry! [*Much lower.*] Harry! [*In a whisper.*] Take me with you. [*Begins to laugh, at first faintly, then louder.*]

[*Window rumbles up, and* CAPT. H.'S *chuckle mingles with* BESSIE'S *laughter which abruptly stops.*]

CAPT. H. [*goes on chuckling; speaks cautiously*]. Is he gone yet, that information fellow? Do you see him anywhere, my dear?

BESSIE [*low and stammering*]. N-no, no! [*Totters away from lamp-post.*] I don't see him.

CAPT. H. [*anxious*]. A grinning vagabond, my dear. Good girl. It's you who drove him away. Good girl.

[*Stage gradually darkens.*]

BESSIE. Go in; be quiet! You have done harm enough.

CAPT. H. [*alarmed*]. Why? Do you hear him yet, my dear?

BESSIE [*sobs, drooping against the railings*]. No! No! I don't. I don't hear him any more.

CAPT. H. [*triumphant*]. Now we shall be all right, my dear, till our Harry comes home to-morrow. [*Affected gurgling laugh.*]

BESSIE [*distracted*]. Be quiet. Shut yourself in. You will make me mad. [*Losing control of herself, repeats with rising inflection.*] You make me mad. [*With despair.*] There is no to-morrow! [*Sinks to ground near middle railings. Low sobs.*]

[*Stage darkens perceptibly.*]

CAPT. H. [*above, in a voice suddenly dismayed and shrill*]. What! What do you say, my dear? No to-morrow? [*Broken, very feebly.*] No—to-morrow? [*Window runs down.*]

CARVIL [*heard within, muffled bellowing*]. Bessie—Bessie—Bessie—Bessie—— [*At the first call* BESSIE *springs up and begins to stumble blindly towards the door. A faint flash of lightning, followed by a very low rumble of thunder.*] You!—Bessie!

CURTAIN

THE SECRET AGENT

TO

JAMES B. PINKER

THE SECRET AGENT

Drama in Four Acts

—

Act I. The Private Life
Act II. The Underworld
Act III. The Upper World
Act IV. The Issue

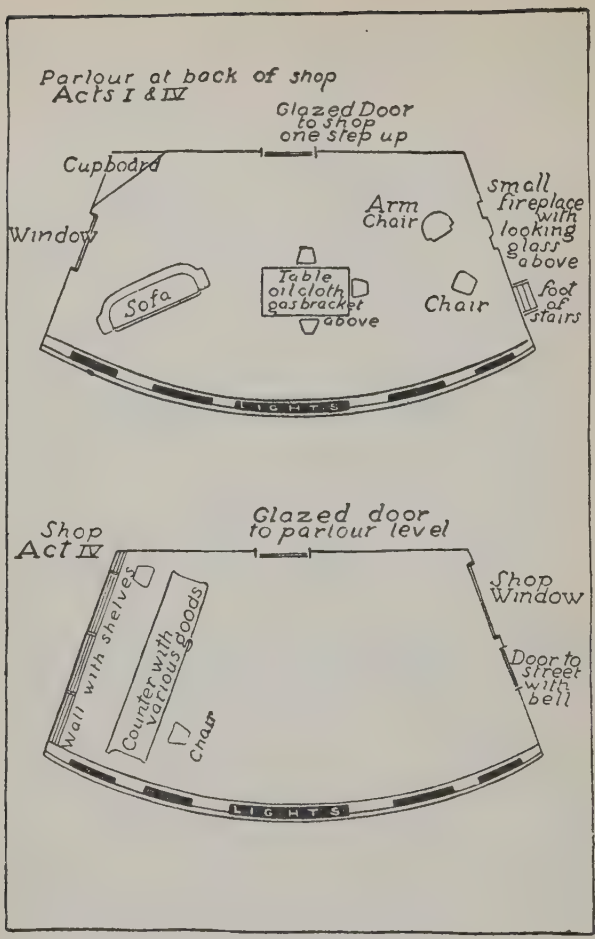
—

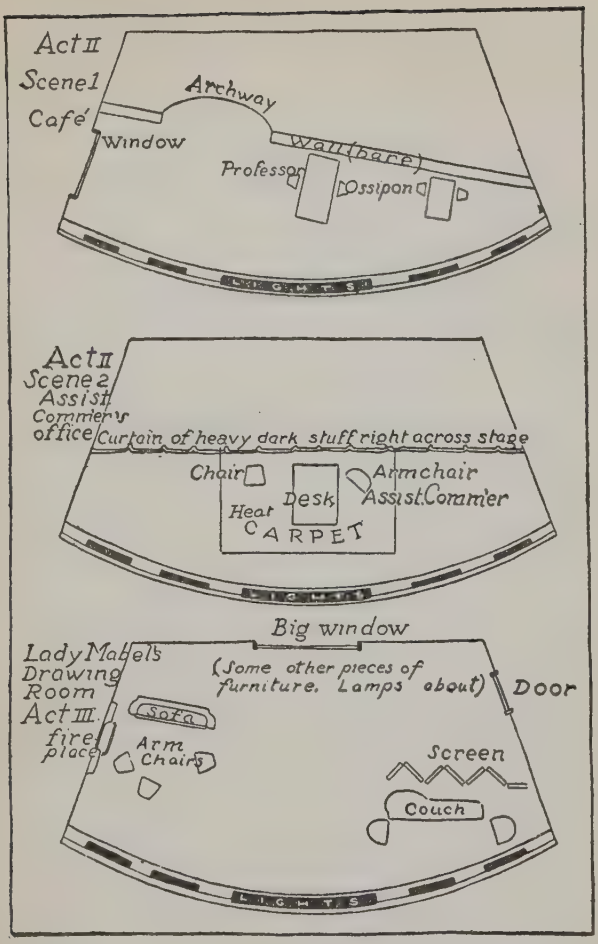
Action in London

Time: A not very distant past

—

One month elapses after Act I. The events of the other three acts take place on the same day


Parlour at back of shop
Acts I & IV
Glazed Door to shop one step up
Cupboard
Window
Arm Chair
small fireplace with looking glass above
Sofa
Table oilcloth gas bracket above
Chair
foot of stairs
LIGHTS
Shop
Act IV
Glazed door to parlour level
Shop Window
Door to street with bell
Wall with shelves
Counter with various goods
Chair
LIGHTS


Act II
Scene 1
Café
Archway
Window
Wall (bare)
Professor
Ossipon
LIGHTS
Act II
Scene 2
Assist. Commier's office
Curtain of heavy dark stuff right across stage
Chair
Desk
Armchair
Assist. Commier
Heat
CARPET
LIGHTS
Big window
Lady Mabel's Drawing Room
Act III.
(Some other pieces of furniture, Lamps about)
Door
Sofa
fire place
Arm Chairs
Screen
Couch
LIGHTS

PERSONS IN THE DRAMA

Winnie Verloc
Mr. Verloc
Winnie's Mother
Stevie
Mr. Vladimir
Inspector Heat
Assistant Commissioner
Ossipon
Michaelis
Karl Yundt
The "Professor"
Lady Mabel
A Lady Guest
A Maid
Lady Mabel's Guests
Members of the Police

THE SECRET AGENT

THE SECRET AGENT

ACT I

The Private Life

PARLOUR behind Mr. Verloc's shop containing a high-backed sofa to left; a plain wooden table, oil-cloth cover, in middle; a few wooden chairs, a fireplace to right. The bottom of stairs leading to rooms above should be seen at right as near proscenium as possible. When the curtain rises Mother *sits on the couch, bonnet on, outdoor things by her side.* Winnie, *about thirty, dark hair done up very neatly, quiet bearing, good figure, plain, close-fitting dark dress, stands on one side of central table nearest her mother and facing* Stevie, *who stands on the other side in shirt sleeves, green baize apron.*

Winnie. What do you want with this apron on in the afternoon? There is no work for you to do at this time of the day.

Stevie [*about 17, slight, fair, pale, nervous, at times a little vacant*]. Always is. I like to work for you, Winnie. [*Solemn.*] And for Mr. Verloc.

Mother. You could never do enough for Mr. Verloc, Stevie.

Stevie. Because he is good? Isn't Mr. Verloc good, Winnie?

Winnie [*slowly*]. Yes. He is good.

MOTHER. Don't forget, Stevie, that whatever Mr. Verloc says is right.

WINNIE [*over her shoulder to her mother*]. That boy would go through fire and water for Mr. Verloc. [*To* STEVIE.] Here you are all untidy and it is getting late. Run upstairs and wash your hands and face. You must make yourself smart to take care of me in the streets. We must see Mother settled in her new home. Don't you know, Stevie, that Mother is leaving us to-day?

MOTHER [*stifled voice, verge of tears*]. I thought that a little place of my own . . .

STEVIE [*alarmed*]. You aren't going away because Mr. Verloc isn't good?

MOTHER. Stevie! The idea! [*Handkerchief to eyes*]. He is only too good to us all. I have often felt that . . . [*Sob.*]

WINNIE [*looks over her shoulder at her mother.*] Felt what? [*To* STEVIE.] Run along, Stevie. [STEVIE *moves off.*] Brush your coat carefully now, I will call you down when the cab is at the door. [*Exit* STEVIE *up the stairs.*] I can hardly believe it's true. [*While saying this* WINNIE *turns about and faces her mother.*] You leaving us like this! Weren't you comfortable enough with us, Mother?

MOTHER. My dear, you have been the best of daughters to me; and as to Mr. Verloc—there . . . [*Clasps her hands emotionally.*]

WINNIE. Well, then, what did you want to do that extraordinary thing for, Mother?

MOTHER. My dear, the best of men may get tired.

WINNIE [*continuing steadily*]. Throwing yourself like this on a charity! Whatever will people think of us? How on earth did you manage it, Mother? These Almshouses aren't so easy to get into unless you've got influence.

MOTHER [*after wiping eyes*]. I went round to all poor Dad's friends that are still living.

WINNIE [*always steady*]. That was where all the change you've been asking me for, went. Half-crowns and five shillings almost every day for a month. Cab fares, I suppose?

MOTHER. My legs are failing me altogether. I am an old woman. Did Mr. Verloc perhaps . . .

WINNIE. Mr. Verloc doesn't worry about a few shillings. We are never short, if we make no show.

MOTHER. Yes, you never made a show. I used to wonder how this small dark place would suit your health.

WINNIE. I am always well. [*Pause.*] This place suits Mr. Verloc's business.

MOTHER. I never dared to ask what his business might be. Surely it isn't this shop? It's beyond my understanding.

WINNIE. Then don't try to understand, Mother. I don't trouble my head about it. [*Pause, then in the same level tone.*] Things don't stand looking into much. . . . So you went pitching a little tale of distress to everyone you ever knew in your married life! They must have been wondering who you were.

MOTHER. They recognized me after a bit, most of them. But oh, the changes, the changes in them, my dear girl! Mr. Geoffrey now! You can't have for-

gotten the jolly Mr. Geoffrey. He's all thin and grey now, like a walking shadow, my dear. Still keeps the same place in Kingsland Road. He and Dad used to drive to races together. Two such fine men. Poor Dad was a very fine man. [*Tearful.*]

WINNIE [*steady voice*]. I remember a lot, but the less you talk to me about Dad the better. [*Pause, very calm.*] He was no end of a brute . . . Dad was.

MOTHER. Oh Winnie! How can you? You shouldn't. . . . Not of the dead!

WINNIE. I used to tell him that to his face when he was alive and I was so high.

MOTHER. You were never frightened of poor Dad.

WINNIE. And a good thing too that there was somebody in the house that wasn't frightened.

MOTHER [*hangs head for a moment*]. Yes, you could stand up to him. You were always a plucky girl, Winnie.

WINNIE. Not much. No more plucky than other people. Somebody had to stand up for the child. Oh yes, I know what you will say, Dad wasn't a bad man. No. But the drink in him was bad. Bad enough for murder, I believe. Bad and cowardly too, thank goodness for that. It was as if Dad had been afraid of me. Funny thing being afraid of a little girl. Perhaps he could see I didn't care what he did. I was ready to fly at his eyes like a little cat more than once.

MOTHER. Winnie! How can you talk of this so quietly?

WINNIE. Well, I never did. But I believe he *was* afraid of me.

MOTHER [*slight shriek*]. Winnie! Don't you know that the man was fond of you. Real fond of you—in his heart.

WINNIE. Was that it? Well, as long as I could keep him from being cruel to Stevie, I didn't care if it was love or fear.

MOTHER. Poor Dad was so disappointed in his boy. It made him feel so small to have a weak-minded son.

WINNIE. He had a down on him. I can't stand any cruelty. The world is bad enough without fathers hating their own children. I tell you straight I was glad when Dad died. [MOTHER *slight groan.*] Why yes, it was drink, I suppose, but that didn't make it any easier. If he had lived a few months longer you would have found yourself on the pavement with me and Stevie, without even a few sticks of furniture to begin life again.

MOTHER [*earnest*]. I don't know what I would have done without you, Winnie.

WINNIE [*reminiscent half-smile*]. Letting rooms *is* a funny business.

MOTHER. What else could we have done to make a home for that dear sweet boy—he being a little peculiar.

WINNIE [*equable*]. Everybody is a little peculiar. What's the use worrying about it? I don't hardly notice anything in him.

MOTHER. But I had to. Suppose you had married some young struggling man and gone away with him? What could I have done with that big house and poor Stevie on my hands? Winnie, your marrying Mr. Verloc was providential. There was never such an open-handed man. You remember—from the first.

WINNIE [*slightly explanatory*]. He wanted me for his wife.

MOTHER. Wasn't he generous to us all! He took notice of our Stevie almost directly after he came to lodge with us. He hadn't been a month in his rooms when he tipped Stevie five shillings.

WINNIE. My brother.

MOTHER. You talk as if it was all your doing. Stevie is a nice boy. He was nice from a child.

WINNIE. And he will be a child all his life.

MOTHER [*distressed*]. That's it. That's just it, and I am an old woman. I can't think of myself dead and of poor Stevie thrown on the streets, perhaps in a workhouse infirmary.

WINNIE. You needn't fancy things like that. I am a young woman.

MOTHER. Yes. You began to be a mother to him when you were in pinafores.

WINNIE [*half-smile*]. I am much more fit to be a mother to him now. [*Change of tone.*] That time doesn't bear thinking about. I am sure I don't want to remember it. Nothing can be so bad as that used to be. The boy is safe enough now, but I believe that you like to have a worry of your own. Life does not stand much looking into. Why are you staring at me as if you didn't know me, Mother? It doesn't. We have been going on very well for seven years. I am satisfied.

MOTHER. You are satisfied.

WINNIE. I would have been more satisfied if you had not taken that funny notion into your head. That boy will be missing you awfully at first. He will mope

something dreadful. I can't stand him looking wretched. He had enough wretchedness when he was a little boy to last him a life-time. What I am going to do with him I don't know.

MOTHER. Don't let him worry your husband, my dear.

WINNIE. My husband! He hardly ever takes any notice of Stevie. [*Pause.*] Mr. Verloc is easy to live with. That I must say.

MOTHER. I am afraid that poor boy may run out when you aren't looking and lose his way in the streets. He has been lost before. I can't bear the thought of him wandering about and getting run over, perhaps.

WINNIE. Stevie will make for the first policeman he can see. He likes policemen. I took care to tell him that policemen are good men.

MOTHER. And he stutters so when he has to speak to strangers. He's quite apt to forget where he lives too.

WINNIE. That will be all right. I have thought of something for that.

MOTHER. Winnie, you are wonderful, you think of everything.

WINNIE. Yes, I thought of everything, except of you going off and leaving your children. However, since you've made up your mind I thought that perhaps you will want to see the boy sometimes. Remember I mayn't be always free to come with him.

MOTHER. Winnie—don't let him come alone. It's too far, there are two omnibuses to take and a walk between, he is sure to get lost for days. [*Great distress.*]

WINNIE. I have seen to that. [*Pulls one chair back from the table. Overcoat on it. Picks it up.*] Look at his overcoat, Mother. I have sewn a tape with our address written as plain as can be in marking ink under the collar. I haven't put his name on it. The police would bring him straight here, of course.

MOTHER. You think of everything.

WINNIE. Well, he will be on my hands altogether.

MOTHER [*deep sigh*]. He always was that, Winnie. He has no one to depend on now but you and Mr. Verloc. What little of my furniture there is here is all yours now [*distress*] my dear.

WINNIE. Stevie is safe enough with us. Don't take on so, Mother.

MOTHER. I don't. [*Lower.*] It was my very idea to make him safe.

WINNIE. Was it? Oh, you mean by going away.

MOTHER. Yes. To leave him is the best thing I can do for him now. And it nearly breaks my old heart.

WINNIE [*slowly*]. You have your own way of being deep, Mother.

MOTHER. Believe me, my girl, that the best of men may get tired. They do. Oh, they very soon do! And of a helpless old woman at that!

WINNIE [*with meaning*]. Mr. Verloc would have to get tired of me first.

[*Short pause. The two women look at each other.* WINNIE *turns her head away slowly.*]

MOTHER. You are very sure of yourself, my girl.

WINNIE. I suppose I am. Where's the harm?

MOTHER [*deep sigh*]. Well, all I can say is you are very lucky.

[*During the last two replicas* WINNIE *leaning back against the table doesn't look at her mother but straight at the audience.*]

WINNIE. Yes, I am lucky . . . I suppose.

MOTHER. I mean—to be loved by a man like that.

WINNIE. Yes. That's what I mean.

STEVIE [*voice down the stairs*]. Why don't you call me down, Winnie? I have been ready a long time.

WINNIE. Wait a moment, dear.

[*Remains staring in front of her.*]

MOTHER [*half timid*]. Winnie!

WINNIE [*as before*]. What?

MOTHER [*as before*]. I think you were fond of somebody else. You went about looking very dull. There was that young . . .

WINNIE [*as before but tone a little impatient*]. Yes, yes, I suppose I was like other girls. . . . And you saw it, Mother?

MOTHER. You were the picture of quiet misery, my poor girl. [*Emotional.*] Oh, Winnie, Winnie! Haven't I a mother's eyes? And then when I looked again at that poor helpless boy I dared not breathe a word of comfort to you.

WINNIE. Of course. But I didn't want any words. Words would have been no good. I would have done worse for Stevie.

MOTHER. Don't talk like that, Winnie, you make me all of a tremble. I too have had an awful time between you two.

WINNIE. Why trouble your head about all that now? I am satisfied.

MOTHER. Providence saved us all by sending you a man like Mr. Verloc.

WINNIE [*repeats with slight emphasis*]. I am satisfied.

[*During the last few replicas* STEVIE's *legs are visible at the bottom of the stairs.*]

STEVIE [*jumps straight into the room*]. Hoo!

MOTHER [*slight scream*]. Stevie! You did give me a turn!

WINNIE [*affected severity*]. Were you trying to frighten us, Stevie?

STEVIE [*exultant*]. Yes, and I did it too. You didn't hear me creep downstairs. You were frightened, Winnie, weren't you?

WINNIE [*calm.*] My heart is thumping ever so.

STEVIE [*delighted*]. I was as quiet as a mouse.

WINNIE. You bad boy. What would Mr. Verloc have said to that if he had been here.

STEVIE [*crestfallen*]. I don't know.

WINNIE. Isn't it cruel to frighten people?

STEVIE [*alarmed*]. No! No! Not cruel. Joke. Don't be angry, Winnie.

WINNIE. And a very nasty joke too. [*Tries to push him away but when* STEVIE *manages to take her face between his hands she becomes still. They look at each other for a time.*] No, I am not angry. When you

have done with my face. You know how to take advantage of me, Stevie.

STEVIE [*caressingly*]. You will always be fond of me, Winnie?

WINNIE. Enough not to allow anybody to frighten you; let alone trying to frighten you myself.

STEVIE [*contrite*]. I am sorry, Winnie. [*Mobile.*] Yesterday I was talking to a cabman. He had white bristles all over his face.

MOTHER [*sitting with hands folded in her lap looking at* WINNIE *and* STEVIE]. What did you want to do that for, Stevie? Talk to a strange cabman. . . .

STEVIE. No, not stranger. Friend. On the rank at the end of our street. I told him I was sorry for his horse.

WINNIE. You did!

STEVIE [*loquacious*]. Such a poor thin horse. The cabman has a wife and four children at home. And so he must whip him. But he is not a bad man. Only poor. He called me a queer young fellow and thumped me in the chest like that. Not angry. He thumped his horse too, in the ribs, and he told me—what did he say? Oh, like this: "hard world for horses but damn sight harder for poor chaps like me. Damn sight harder. Damn sight. . . ."

MOTHER. Stevie! Don't repeat nasty swear words. It's wicked.

STEVIE. No, not wicked! Quite friendly. He likes me. He said so.

WINNIE [*to her mother*]. People do take to him wonderfully.

STEVIE [*continuing*]. He knows us. He gave me a little push and told me to go home and not interfere in things I did not understand.

WINNIE. You interfered! About what!

STEVIE. I didn't. I only stood and looked at his horse for a long time, and when the cabman asked me if I would know him again I told him he mustn't ever whip him.

WINNIE. Well, I never!

STEVIE. What is it I didn't understand, Winnie?

WINNIE [*helping her mother into rusty black cloak.*] I don't know. [*All standing up now.* MOTHER *handkerchief to eyes from time to time*].

STEVIE [*stamps foot*]. Why can't I understand? I am a man now.

WINNIE [*busy about her mother*]. Rather. [*To her mother.*] You have been a little too deep, Mother, but I suppose now it must be. I only hope you will like your new home.

MOTHER. Like it! Don't say that, Winnie. But suppose Mr. Verloc . . . .

WINNIE [*getting bag, umbrella. Emphatic*]. Mr. Verloc is all right.

MOTHER. The best of men! But he hardly ever speaks. One cannot guess what he is thinking of.

WINNIE. I know how he acts. . . . He can't do without me.

MOTHER. Oh Winnie! My poor girl.

WINNIE. Well, what of that? I am satisfied. I have Stevie with me.

MOTHER [*sigh, low tone*]. Perhaps it's just as well that you had no children.

STEVIE [*has been standing still in brown study. Exclaims*]. I *do* understand! Bad world for poor people. Bbbbbb . . . ad. . . .

WINNIE. Stevie, don't stutter.

STEVIE. He said hard. Hard world for ppp. . . .

WINNIE. Stop it. Don't trouble your head about it. It won't be hard for you as long as I live. Go and see if the cab is at the door. [*Exit* STEVIE. WINNIE *to her mother.*] He isn't fit to hear every kind of talk, it excites him. When Mr. Verloc's friends come here of an evening I try to keep Stevie out of the way.

MOTHER. Mr. Verloc's friends. What is it they come to talk about, Winnie? I of course always took care to keep upstairs, of an evening.

WINNIE. Oh, I don't trouble my head much about their talk. It seems to me the wildest. . . .

STEVIE [*at shop door*]. Cab's here. My poor friend. [*Walks forward.*] And can nobody help poor people, Winnie?

WINNIE [*collecting parcels*]. Not much.

STEVIE. What, not even the police?

WINNIE. No.

STEVIE [*aghast*]. Can't they? What are they for then, Winnie? What are they for then? [*Agitated.*] Do tell me.

WINNIE [*impatient and busy*]. Don't you know what the police are for, Stevie?

STEVIE [*anxious*]. What are they for?

WINNIE [*as before*]. They are there so that them as have nothing shouldn't take anything away from them that have. [*Turns away to her mother, explanatory.*] I wouldn't say steal because the very word makes Stevie uncomfortable.

MOTHER. He is a good boy.

WINNIE. He doesn't know what evil means. He's a real innocent.

MOTHER [*impulsive*]. Winnie, I believe he is the only thing you love in the world.

WINNIE [*slow*]. Perhaps.

MOTHER [*sigh*]. Well, you have been a good daughter to me.

[*All moving towards the shop door when it opens.* MR. VERLOC *enters and stands aside.*]

WINNIE. You are just in time to see Mother, Adolf. Do tell her that nobody here wanted her to go.

MR. VERLOC [*a heavy-eyed bulky man, full face, medium height, slight stoop, sandy hair and moustache. Effort to be pleasant. Husky*]. Certainly. Not I. I am fond of your girl. Come to see her often. [*Effort nearly breaks down.*] Good-bye. [*To* WINNIE.] Don't be away long. I miss you out of the house.

WINNIE. I am afraid I shall have to be a little late. You will have to get your own tea.

MR. VERLOC [*grunts*]. All right.

[*Moves forward and drops into a chair. The women pass out.* STEVIE *lingers to gaze reverently at* MR. VERLOC *who takes his hat off his head and*

holds it at arm's length. STEVIE *rushes from behind to seize it and deposit it respectfully on the sideboard*].

WINNIE [*voice outside*]. Come along, Stevie. It's getting late.

STEVIE *withdraws looking over his shoulder to the last moment at* MR. VERLOC'S *back.*]

MR. VERLOC. Shut the door behind you.

STEVIE [*awed voice*]. Yes, Mr. Verloc. [*Exit.*]

[*Everything still.* MR. V. *gets up. Heavy. Morose. Overcoat unbuttoned. Head low. Walks up and down. On the first turn, right, says:*]

MR. VERLOC. Dog's life. [*On the second turn, left, says:*] But I won't be a dog to anybody. [*When he is in the middle of the stage, shop bell rings. He says:*] Damn. [*Swerves to look through glass. Remains back to audience for a moment, then walks to footlights and mutters an astonished:*] Well! I am damned. [*Banging of stick on counter heard in shop.* MR. VERLOC *shouts:*] Coming! [*But doesn't move. Door to shop opens slowly,* MR. VLADIMIR *looks in, then comes forward.*]

MR. VLAD. [*man about town, very correct, open overcoat, silk hat, rolled-up umbrella, waxed moustache, round face*]. Is that how you receive your customers?

[MR. VERLOC *spins round. Deferential attitude sideways to audience*].

MR. VERLOC [*deep bass voice*]. How could I tell it was you, sir?

MR. VLAD. Exactly. You must have thought it was a customer. You ought to have hurried into the shop instead of merely yelling here.

MR. VERLOC. I was coming out.

MR. VLAD. Hm! I was long enough there to look at your wares. It seems to me that you are dealing in revolutionary literature and obscene photographs. I suppose you find it a good combination. Intellectual indecency and that other kind. [*Moves forward,* MR. VERLOC *moves aside; facing each other across the table.*] But I daresay it isn't so bad as it looks. I am perfectly convinced those customers of yours don't get anything like value for their money. I mean your—let us call them "art" customers.

MR. VERLOC. Yes, that's about it.

MR. VLAD. And the politicals are even worse off. They get sold themselves. But I am your employer and I will repeat to you what I said when I made you call on me at the Embassy the other day—that I don't intend to be cheated. Don't look so glum. I only want you to distinguish yourself. You don't look very pleased. [MR. VERLOC *makes a slight movement of hands.*] Why don't you offer me a chair?

MR. VERLOC. You're at home here.

MR. VLAD. Ah, yes. Our Secret Service money keeps this establishment. [*Looks round.*] An awful hole. What made you take to that particular kind of shop?

MR. VERLOC [*heavy*]. I know what I am about.

MR. VLAD. Well, being at home, I will sit down. [*Pulls out chair from under table. Lays down hat and umbrella. Throws himself back in chair.*] For the same reason I won't ask you to sit down.

MR. VERLOC [*husky tone*]. I know my place.

MR. VLAD. You understand French, of course.

MR. VERLOC. Of course.

MR. VLAD. Of course. We will talk English nevertheless. When I called you to the Embassy I really had no time to go into the whole question. . . . Let's see—I believe that years ago you obtained for my Government the confidential designs of a new French field-gun. How much did you get for that job?

MR. VERLOC [*huskily*]. Five years' rigorous confinement in a fortress.

MR. VLAD. [*recovers from surprise*]. That's not so very much. And anyhow it serves you right for letting yourself be caught. . . . What made you go in for this occupation, eh? What were you before? One isn't born a secret agent.

MR. VERLOC [*husky. Apologetic*]. I was a mechanic, but I was young then and a fatal infatuation for an unworthy . . .

MR. VLAD. Aha! Cherchez la femme . . . How long have you been employed by our Embassy here?

MR. VERLOC [*huskily*]. Ever since the time of the late Baron Stott-Wartenheim.

MR. VLAD. [*absently*]. Ever since. [*Sharply.*] Well, what have you got to say for yourself?

MR. VERLOC [*heavily*]. I don't know that I have anything special to say. You summoned me by letter last week to the Embassy and I went—at eleven o'clock in the morning too! That might have been very dangerous for me.

MR. VLAD. Oh, your dear friends the revolutionists wouldn't stick at a trifle. Well, I come to you this time.

MR. VERLOC [*sinister*]. And if you only go on like this you may yet have a corpse mixed up in this business. . . . Yours or mine.

MR. VLAD. Pah . . . Look here, what do you mean by letting yourself get fat like this? You—a member of the starving proletariat! Never! You—a desperate socialist or anarchist—which is it?

MR. VERLOC [*grunt*]. Anarchist.

MR. VLAD. Bosh! You wouldn't deceive an idiot. . . . So you began your connection with us by stealing the French gun designs. And you got yourself caught. That must have been very annoying for our Government. You don't seem to be very smart.

MR. VERLOC [*exculpatory*]. As I have had the honour of observing before, a fatal infatuation for a low, unworthy——

MR. VLAD. [*raises a gloved hand*]. Oh, yes, the unlucky attachment of your youth. She got hold of all the money and then sold you to the police—for a little more money. Eh? [MR. VERLOC'S *whole person droops affirmatively, with an apologetic movement of hands.* MR. VLADIMIR *throws ankle on knee, easy attitude.*] That was not very clever of you. Perhaps your heart is too susceptible.

MR. VERLOC [*veiled murmur*]. I am no longer young.

MR. VLAD. Oh, age doesn't cure that little weakness. But no, you have grown too fat to have ever been susceptible. I will tell you what I think is the matter: you are a lazy fellow. How long have you been drawing pay from this Embassy?

MR. VERLOC [*sulky hesitation*]. Eleven years. I have been charged with several missions to England

while His Excellency, Baron Stott-Wartenheim, was still Ambassador in Paris. Then when His Excellency came over here he gave me instructions to settle down in London. I am English.

MR. VLAD. You are. Are you?

MR. VERLOC [*stolidly*]. Natural born British subject. But my father was a . . . .

MR. VLAD. [*brusquely*]. Never mind explaining. You are a lazy fellow. In the time of Baron Stott-Wartenheim there was a lot of soft-headed people running our Embassy, and so fellows of your sort formed a false notion of what the Secret Service is. I want to correct any such misapprehension by telling you what the Secret Service is *not*. It is not a philanthropic foundation. I have called here on purpose to tell you that.

MR. VERLOC [*huskily*]. I really fail to perceive.

MR. VLAD. [*sarcastic*]. I see you understand me perfectly. I daresay you are intelligent enough. What we want now is activity—activity. [*Lays forefinger on edge of table.*]

MR. VERLOC. [*Slight movement back, booms out in great oratorical bass.*] If you will only be good enough to look up my record you will see that I gave an important warning only three months ago on the occasion of the Grand Duke Archibald's visit to Paris, which was telegraphed from here to the French police and . . .

MR. VLAD. [*frowning grimace*]. Tut, tut! The French police had no use for your warning. Don't bellow at me like this. What the devil do you mean?

MR. VERLOC [*proud humility*]. I beg your pardon. My voice was famous years ago. I was always put

up to speak at the critical moment. With a voice like that I was naturally thought a lot of by the leaders.

MR. VLAD. [*touches his bow necktie*]. I daresay you have the revolutionary jargon by heart. Vox et . . . You have never studied Latin, I suppose.

MR. VERLOC [*growl*]. No. You didn't expect me to know it, perhaps? I belong to the million. Who knows Latin? Only a few hundred imbeciles who aren't fit to take care of themselves.

MR. VLAD. Aha, you dare be impudent. [*Gets up, threateningly.*] You dare! Well, I am going to speak plain English to you. Voice won't do. We don't want a voice. We want facts—startling facts—damn you.

MR. VERLOC [*defending himself, downcast eyes*]. Don't you try to come over me with your hyperborean manners.

MR. VLAD. [*nod. Smile*]. As far as I can judge you have done nothing to earn your money for the last four years. [MR. VERLOC *raises his arms. Shop bell rings. A moment of silence.*] You had better go and see. [*Exit* VERLOC, *bustling, heavy.* MR. VLADIMIR *goes to glass, touches necktie, ends of moustache, looks round the room, says:*] Impudent, lazy brute. [*Watches markedly* VERLOC *returning from shop. Spluttering laugh after a time and speaks.*] You have been quick. What did you sell him?

MR. VERLOC [*surlily*]. I told him I hadn't got it. It was the quickest way.

MR. VLAD. Did you? Ha, ha, you will ruin your connection. I suppose you have a little select connection—what? Funny blind a shop like this for your

real—ah—occupation. Who put you up to it? Not the late Baron Stott-Wartenheim, what?

MR. VERLOC [*standing heavily, eyes on the floor*]. My own notion.

MR. VLAD. Ah, natural affinity. Shop of secret wares—and a shady life. You seem to have been set apart by your temperament to be a secret agent in every way. Nice lazy trade, eh? But I have this matter in hand now and you will have to earn your money. No work—no pay.

MR. VERLOC. Permit me to observe that it isn't very wise to call me up or come to see me like this. It may destroy my usefulness. There are eyes about. . . . Even my wife. . . .

MR. VLAD. [*guttural*]. Your what?

MR. VERLOC [*raised husky voice*]. My wife. I am married.

MR. VLAD. [*astonishment*]. That be damned for a yarn! Married! And you a professed anarchist too. But I suppose it is just a manner of speaking. Anarchists don't marry. They can't. It would be apostasy.

MR. VERLOC. My wife isn't one. [*Mumbling resentfully*]. Moreover, it's no concern of yours.

MR. VLAD. [*snappy*]. Oh yes, it is. Why! You must have discredited yourself completely in your own world by your marriage. Couldn't you have managed without? So this is your virtuous attachment, is it? What with one sort of attachment and another you are doing away with your usefulness yourself. [*Pauses.* MR. VERLOC *inflates his cheeks and lets the air escape.*] His wife! [*To* MR. VERLOC.] Where is she now?

MR. VERLOC [*surly*]. Out with my mother-in-law. May be back any minute.

MR. VLAD. Ha! Ha! He has a mother-in-law too! You must be mad. You are overdoing your respectability. However, that's your affair. But don't forget that when you cease to be useful you shall cease to be employed. Yes. Right off. Cut short. You shall—[*casting about for the right word, then ferociously*]—you shall be chucked. [*Throws himself in the chair again very easy, clasping ankle on knee.* MR. VERLOC *takes handkerchief out of pocket, wipes his brow.*] I came on purpose to tell you this. You give yourself for a secret agent. The proper business for an agent of your sort is to provoke. As far as I can judge from your record we have at the Embassy you have done nothing to speak of for the last four years.

MR. VERLOC [*loud*]. Nothing! I have several times prevented what might have been. . . .

MR. VLAD. [*stops him*]. They have a proverb in this country that prevention is better than cure. They dislike finality in England. Don't you be too English. And in this particular instance don't be absurd. The evil is already with us. We don't want prevention. We want a cure. You know of course of the International Conference sitting now in Milan on means of repression.

MR. VERLOC [*hoarse*]. I read the daily papers.

MR. VLAD. I suppose you understand what you read.

MR. VERLOC [*grump*]. Of course.

MR. VLAD. As long as it is not written in Latin, I suppose.

MR. VERLOC [*stolid.*] Or Chinese.

MR. VLAD. What we want is to administer a tonic to the anti-revolutionary Conference in Milan. Their deliberations on the suppression of political crime don't seem to get anywhere. It's England that delays us, with her sentimental regard for individual liberty. It's intolerable to think that all your friends have only to come over here to. . . .

MR. VERLOC. In that way I have them all under my eye.

MR. VLAD. It would be much more to the point to have them all under lock and key. England must be brought into line. The imbecile bourgeois here was sentimental over the very people whose only aim is to drive them out of their houses to starve in ditches. I suppose you will agree with me that the middle classes are stupid?

MR. VERLOC [*husky*]. They are.

MR. VLAD. They have no imagination. What we want just now is to stimulate it by a jolly good scare. What I have in my mind is a series of anarchistic outrages. Here—in England. Your friends could set all the continent on fire without influencing English public opinion a bit. They will not look outside their backyard here. See?

MR. VERLOC [*with effort*]. I see.

MR. VLAD. These outrages need not be sanguinary but they must be really startling. What is the fetish of the hour? Eh, Mr. Verloc?

MR. VERLOC [*shrugs shoulders slightly*]. I don't know.

MR. VLAD. You are too lazy to think. Pay attention to what I say. The fetish of to-day is neither royalty nor religion, therefore the palace and the church should be left alone. You understand what I mean, Mr. Verloc?

MR. VERLOC [*attempt at levity*]. Perfectly. But what of the Embassies? A series of bombs on the Embassies would——

MR. VLAD. [*grim*]. You can be facetious, I see. But you had better be serious with me. An attempt on a crowned head or on a president is no longer the sensational event it used to be. It's almost conventional, especially since so many presidents have been assassinated. I shall try not to talk above your head. A bomb outrage now-a-days must go beyond the intention of vengeance or terrorism. You anarchists should make it clear that you are determined to make a clean sweep of the whole of mankind's creation. But how is one to get that absurd notion into the heads of the middle classes so that there should be no mistake? That is the question. By directing your blows at something outside the ordinary passions of mankind. That is the answer. A bomb in the National Gallery would raise some screaming, of course, but from whom? Artists, art critics and such-like, people of no account. Nobody minds what that kind of people say. But there is learning, science. Every imbecile does really believe that science matters somehow. It is the modern fetish. Those damned professors too, are all radicals at heart. Let them know that their great science—panjandrum has got to go too to make room for the future of the proletariat. A howl from these intellectual idiots would spur on the Milan Conference. Blow up churches, theatres full of people—that's no good. The journalist

would explain it away by personal grievances or mere class hatred. Moreover, I am a civilized man. I would never direct you to organize a mere butchery even if I expected a good result from it. But I wouldn't expect from a butchery the result I want. Murder is always with us. It is an old and venerable institution. No, it is science that must be gone for, and the attack must be particularly gratuitous, shocking, and senseless—like blasphemy. Since bombs are your means of expression it would be really telling if one of your friends could throw a bomb into pure mathematics. However, that's impossible. But what do you think of having a go at astronomy, Mr. Verloc?

MR. VERLOC [*astounded*]. Astronomy?

MR. VLAD. Nothing better. And nothing easier. Why not blow up the Observatory? It would combine the greatest possible regard for humanity with the most alarming display of imbecile ferocity. I defy any journalist to persuade the public that any given member of the proletariat can have a personal grievance against astronomy. Starvation itself can hardly be dragged in there. There are other advantages too. The whole world has heard of Greenwich Observatory. The very boot-blacks in Charing Cross Station know something of it. Yes. The blowing up of the first meridian is bound to raise a howl.

MR. VERLOC [*mumble*]. A difficult business.

MR. VLAD. What's the matter? Haven't you the whole gang under your hand? I see that old terrorist Yundt almost every morning walking in Piccadilly in his green overcoat. And Michaelis, the ticket-of-leave apostle—you don't mean to say you don't know where *he* is? [*Threatening.*] Because if you don't I can tell

you. . . . And the whole Lausanne lot, eh? Haven't they been flocking over here at the first hint of the general repressive measures on the Continent? [*Quieter.*] England is an absurd country.

MR. VERLOC [*reflective*]. It would require a lot of money.

MR. VLAD. None of that! That cock won't fight! You'll get your screw and no more till something happens. And if nothing happens very soon you won't get even that. I will have your name struck off the list. [*Pause. Looks markedly at* MR. VERLOC. *Changed tone.*] And remember you are no longer young, Mr. Verloc. A secret agent who gets—how do you say it? —gets the sack—hasn't got much chance at anything else. Think of that, Mr. Verloc.

MR. VERLOC [*during the preceding speech has been moving from one foot to another. Suppressed fury*]. I think that all you people ought to be blown up.

MR. VLAD. [*negligent; detached*]. I dare say. And where would you be then? [*Picks up hat, umbrella.*] Just go and make sure that none of your friends are dodging about outside.

MR. VERLOC [*gloomy*]. Nobody comes to see me till later in the evening.

MR. VLAD. [*glances at watch*]. Do you know how late it is? [*Buttons overcoat.*] Go and have a look all the same.

[*While* MR. VERLOC *is gone* MR. VLADIMIR, *unsmiling, adjusts hat before glass.*]

MR. VERLOC [*puts his head in hastily*]. Oh damn! Come out into the shop as quick as you can, sir. I see my wife coming down the street. [*Comes forward,*

agitated.] Do go into the shop, sir. You have just time.

MR. VLAD. You are absurd with that wife of yours. Wife! Pah!

MR. VERLOC. Come, sir, you don't want to drive a man into a corner.

[*Tries to hustle* MR. VLADIMIR *towards the door.*]

MR. VLAD. That's exactly what I mean to do with you. Think over well what I have been telling you.

[*As they go out street door bell is heard in the shop and almost immediately afterwards* MR. VERLOC *returns preceded by* STEVIE *and* WINNIE.]

WINNIE. We came back by bus as far as the Strand and walked the rest of the way. It isn't raining. Go upstairs and take your overcoat off, Stevie. Fold it up neatly and put it on the shelf, like a good boy.

STEVIE [*in a huff*]. A man now, Winnie, Mother told me.

WINNIE. Goodness gracious me! You needn't take offence like this, Stevie. You took care of me beautifully. But you know you are untidy when you get a chance. [STEVIE *attempts to take her face in his hands. She lets him.*]

STEVIE. You are not angry with me, Winnie?

WINNIE [*takes his hands away gently*]. Never. Run along now, dear. [*Exit* STEVIE *upstairs.* WINNIE *to* MR. VERLOC.] Who was that foreigner? A customer?

MR. VERLOC [*husky*]. Yes. A customer.

WINNIE. A new one then. Never saw that face before. [*While she speaks she begins to take off her hat and jacket.*] What did he want?

MR. VERLOC [*savage*]. A lot of things.

WINNIE [*calm*]. Anything you will have to go on the Continent to get?

MR. VERLOC [*gloomy*]. I may have to go on the Continent. [*Mutters.*] A damned job.

WINNIE [*coat and hat on arm. Turns her head to look at him*]. You don't look very well, Adolf. [*Pause.*] I say, Adolf, he wasn't one of them Embassy people that have been bothering you lately?

MR. VERLOC [*astonishment and fear*]. Embassy! Bothering! What do you know of embassies? Who has been talking to you of Embassy people?

WINNIE [*puts down hat and jacket on table. Confidential*]. Why, it was you—yourself. You have been talking in your sleep o' nights lately.

MR. VERLOC [*uneasy*]. Have I? I am out of sorts. My digestion . . .

WINNIE. I'll have to doctor you, I see! Who was he, Adolf?

MR. VERLOC [*enraged*]. A Hyperborean swine. What you might call a—a gentleman. [*Falls into brown study.*]

WINNIE [*calm*]. Well, I sha'n't trouble my head about him. It's you who want looking after a bit. I don't want to have you ill on my hands. I am afraid we may have a little trouble with that boy. Now Mother is gone, he will be that restless. He is so useful too. With him to help me I can run this house as easy as easy. If he gets a little flighty, Adolf, I may have to ask you to speak to him. Just a word or two. The least thing from you is gospel to Stevie. You

don't know how devoted he is to you, Adolf. [*Raised voice.*]

MR. VERLOC [*starts*]. What, your brother? I didn't notice.

WINNIE. He is perhaps a little weak-minded but he is not an idiot.

MR. VERLOC [*absent-minded*]. Isn't he? . . . Well, perhaps he isn't.

WINNIE [*earnest*]. And he has such a warm heart! You are, I may say, the only father he has ever known, and he thinks you are good. [*Pause.*] And so you have been, Adolf. We would never let him forget that, Mother and I. [*Pause.*] What are you thinking of, dear?

MR. VERLOC. Emigrating. [*Moves about restlessly.*] France—or California.

WINNIE [*startled*]. The idea! [*Resolute.*] Then you would have to go by yourself. I couldn't think of it! [MR. VERLOC *looks at his wife as if roused from a dream.*] And you know you couldn't do without me.

MR. VERLOC. No, I couldn't. [*Advances towards* WINNIE.]

WINNIE [*extends her hand*]. No, not here. There is a better time for kisses. [MR. VERLOC *stops short.*] I suppose you will be late coming up. I expect your friends will turn up to-night. I am going to get you something to eat. We had our tea outside.

MR. VERLOC. I don't want anything to eat. I have had my fill of that—swine.

WINNIE. Don't trouble your head too much about him, Adolf. You are not a slave. Nobody is a slave

in this country, for all the talk of your friends. I suppose Mr. Yundt is coming.

MR. VERLOC. Yes.

WINNIE. Nasty old man. It's time he was dead.

MR. VERLOC. No fear. Not while that old woman that looks after him is alive. When she goes, there will be an end of Carl Yundt—not before. Michaelis too will turn up, I expect.

WINNIE. He is a dear.

MR. VERLOC [*moody*]. The rich old lady who has taken a fancy to him is going to send him to a cottage in the country to write a book about his prison life. [*Contemptuous.*]

WINNIE. Well, he is a dear.

MR. VERLOC [*goes on, venomous*]. And of course Ossipon. [WINNIE *turns her back on* MR. VERLOC.] Ah, that fellow will never starve as long as there are girls with savings-bank books about. [*Very bitter.*] He is after some poor devil of a governess now, Swede or something. Each of them has got some woman to look after him, while I. . . .

WINNIE. You too! You can't do without me.

MR. VERLOC. That I can't. [*Shop bell rings.*] Ossipon, most likely. He is always first. Unless it's a customer.

WINNIE [*picks up hat, coat, from the table*]. You go, Adolf. I am off upstairs. [MR. VERLOC *goes out and* WINNIE *doesn't move. Enter* OSSIPON *followed by* MR. VERLOC.]

OSSIPON [*blue serge suit, rather bushy fair hair under peaked cap, tall*]. Didn't expect to see you to-night, Mrs. Verloc. [*Advances.*] You don't often favour us.

WINNIE. I am going to bed.

OSSIPON. So early?

WINNIE. I have my brother to look after upstairs.

OSSIPON. Interesting creature, your brother.

WINNIE [*turns round, warmed*]. I do like people to take notice of poor Stevie.

OSSIPON. I have been studying for a doctor at one time, you know, Mrs. Verloc. Oh yes, he is very interesting, your brother is. [*Lower tone.*] Why do you always turn your back on me, Mrs. Verloc? [*Whispers.*] Winnie!

[*Meantime* MR. VERLOC *tramps up and down disregarding them completely. Brown study.*]

WINNIE [*detached*]. As long as I am the only one to turn her back on you, you needn't mind.

OSSIPON [*affectedly doleful*]. People do tell such awful tales about me. Don't you believe them, Mrs. Verloc.

WINNIE [*stolid*]. I don't trouble my head one way or another.

OSSIPON [*incredulous*]. Don't you? Listen! I don't care for anybody on earth. . . .

MR. VERLOC [*tramping up and down*]. Damn.

[OSSIPON *obviously frightened.* WINNIE *moves off, coat and hat on arm.*]

WINNIE [*in passing*]. I wouldn't be any good to you. [*Exit, stairs.*]

OSSIPON [*recovered*]. What was it you said, Verloc?

MR. VERLOC. I! I said damn!

OSSIPON [*easy*]. You have a curious psychology and of course physiology too. Science has ascertained . . .

MR. VERLOC. Damn science.

OSSIPON [*surprised*]. Why?

MR. VERLOC [*grumpy*]. I have had too much of it lately.

OSSIPON [*interested*]. Have you taken up a subject to study?

MR. VERLOC. Oh yes. I have something to study. But all you fellows have some woman or other to live on, whereas I have a woman to keep.

OSSIPON. I don't see the connection. [*Shop bell rings.*]

MR. VERLOC. There's not a hand's turn to be got out of any of you. . . .

OSSIPON [*exasperated and puzzled*]. But I don't see the connection!

[*Door to shop opens and enter* MICHAELIS *backward sustaining and guiding* YUNDT. MICHAELIS *obese, short, clean shaven, black bowler, grey suit.* YUNDT *lean, long white goatee on chin, wide-brimmed hat, worn aslant, shabby greenish havelock, shuffles feet.* MICHAELIS *and* OSSIPON *busy themselves pushing table away to left, placing chairs near fireplace; while* YUNDT *waits, rakish and feeble, leaning with trembling hand on a thick stick in a sort of pose.*]

MR. VERLOC [*stands out of the way*]. I hope you fellows haven't come to talk half the night here.

MICHAELIS [*busy settling* YUNDT *on chair*]. He will have to wait anyhow till his guardian angel comes to fetch him.

MR. VERLOC [*grumpy.*] Guardian old witch, you mean.

MICHAELIS. She has a beautiful devotion. The world is full of devotion if you only take the trouble to look for it. I came out after fifteen years of prison with my eyes opened.

[*All sitting down,* YUNDT *rigid,* MICHAELIS *as if posed,* OSSIPON *legs stretched out, one arm over back of chair, cigarette in long tube. Behind him* MR. VERLOC *turns about like a bear in a cage, overcoat open, no hat.*]

MR. VERLOC. Oh yes, you have got the devotion of a rich old lady.

MICHAELIS. A fine soul. I am trying to blow up in her the fire of universal compassion. The spark is there, a sacred spark in a world of stones. [*Leans forward, spits in the fireplace, sits back, placid.*] We seem to be in the way to-night, Verloc.

MR. VERLOC [*tramping behind their backs*]. You make me mad.

MICHAELIS. At any rate you must let us finish that discussion, Yundt and I.

OSSIPON [*nonchalant*]. Did you two start squabbling in the street as you came along?

YUNDT [*motionless, sudden croak*]. All those fine souls of yours, Michaelis, should be let out of their bloated idle bodies, that are fed on people's raw flesh. Let them rot, I say.

MICHAELIS [*placid*]. That's the very question. Should they? I think not. [*Puffs at pipe.*] What all the souls in the world want is training, guiding in the certain way of mercy, of the natural laws—that do not lie.

OSSIPON. Nonsense. There is no law and no certainty. The teaching propaganda be hanged. What the bulk of the people knows doesn't matter a bit—were its knowledge ever so accurate. What matters is the emotional state of the masses. Without emotion there is no action. [*Pause.*] I am talking now to you scientifically. Scientifically!

MR. VERLOC [*tramping up and down*]. Damn!

OSSIPON. What did you say, Verloc?

MR. VERLOC [*growl*]. Nothing.

[*During the above scene* STEVIE *in trousers, shirt and socks, steals down stairs and sits on lower step, with a sheet of drawing paper on his knees. Draws. Tongue between teeth.*]

YUNDT [*venomous*]. Do you know how I would call the present social conditions? I would call them cannibalistic. The minority, a mere handful, are nourishing their greed on the quivering flesh and warm blood of luckless human beings. You can almost hear the scrunching of the bones.

STEVIE [*slight shrill shriek. Covers eyes with both arms. Perfectly still.* VERLOC *stops,* MICHAELIS *looks round,* YUNDT *unmoved,* OSSIPON *lounges over. A silence while* OSSIPON *stands over* STEVIE, *picks up the sheet and looks at it. Arms fall down. Low anguish*]. No, no! It can't be. Must stop it.

OSSIPON. Very good, very characteristic, absolutely typical.

MR. VERLOC. What's very good? [*Drops on sofa.*]

OSSIPON. This drawing. Typical of a certain form of degeneracy.

MR. VERLOC. You would call this lad a degenerate, would you?

OSSIPON. That's how he would be called scientifically. Impulsive, in a circular and interruptive form. Perfect slave to verbal suggestion. Absolutely helpless. Look at the lobes of his ears. If you read Lombroso . . .

YUNDT [*sudden croak*]. Lombroso's an ass. [OSSIPON *starts and stares.*] For him the criminal is the prisoner! Simple, is it not? What about those who put him there? And what is crime? Does he know that—this imbecile who has got on in this world of gorged fools by writing about the ears and teeth of a lot of poor, unlucky devils. Teeth and ears mark the criminal! Do they? And what about the law that marks him still better, the branding instrument invented by the overfed to keep down the hungry. Red-hot irons on their vile skins—eh? Can't you smell and hear from here the thick hide of the people burn and sizzle?

STEVIE [*jumps up, stammering*]. I won't have poor people hurt. It must be stopped. Mr. Michaelis, you are a nice man, stop it. [*Slight scream.*] Stop it! [*Distracted.*]

[YUNDT *unmoved, rigid,* MICHAELIS *shifts position in chair, looks benevolent.* OSSIPON *superior, throws drawing negligently on table.*]

MR. VERLOC [*grumpy*]. I don't know what my wife's thinking of to let him come down.

STEVIE. Mr. Michaelis, you are a dear. Winnie says so. You stop it. Stop those cruel people. They must be punished.

MICHAELIS [*benevolent*]. That, my dear boy, is rather too much to hope for as yet.

MR. VERLOC [*to* STEVIE]. Stop that fuss. [*Heavily.*] Go over there into that corner.

STEVIE [*passing from agitation to reverence*]. Yes, Mr. Verloc—[*stammering suddenly*]—I—I—I—don't want t—t—t—o be any trouble.

[*Passes up the stage to left corner,* MR. VERLOC *watching him.*]

OSSIPON [*thrusting drawing at him*]. You had better finish this.

WINNIE [*voice heard from the stairs*]. Have you got that boy down there? Send him up to me. I can't come down myself.

MR. VERLOC. Wait a bit. They are just going.

[*General move,* VERLOC *one side, quite still.* MICHAELIS *helping* YUNDT *to rise.*]

OSSIPON [*idle, hands in pockets. To* VERLOC]. You are in a filthy temper to-night, Verloc.

MR. VERLOC [*savage*]. Damned lot of gas-bags. None of you is of any use to me.

OSSIPON [*a little interested*]. Why? You aren't thinking of anything to do? Our line is to lie low just now. [*Slight cynical laugh.*] We are comfortable enough here.

MICHAELIS [*passing through doorway with* YUNDT]. I will see him home. Good-night. [*Exit.* MR. VERLOC *follows them out into the shop.*]

OSSIPON [*left behind, looks at* STEVIE *in his corner but speaks to the invisible* WINNIE. *Sentimentally*]. I stayed behind to say good-night to you.

WINNIE [*voice down the stairs, very steady*]. You needn't have troubled. I am not that sort of woman.

OSSIPON [*as before*]. Interesting chap, that brother of yours.

WINNIE [*voice down the stairs, softened*]. Isn't he? Go away, do. I want to get him to bed.

OSSIPON [*insinuating*]. Why don't you come down to fetch him?

WINNIE [*voice from above, indignant*]. Not likely! In my nightgown.

OSSIPON [*appreciative*]. Oh, my word!

[*In the intervals of the above dialogue sounds of voices are heard in the shop once or twice.*]

MR. VERLOC [*appearing at door*]. Come along, Ossipon. I want to lock up the place.

OSSIPON [*lounging out, hands in pockets*]. I've been observing that boy of yours. He could be made to do any deadly thing, almost. I would keep my eye on him. He would set your place on fire as soon as not.

[*Exit, past* VERLOC *who follows him. The shop door bell starts ringing sharply and* WINNIE *steps out on the stage in nightgown buttoned at wrist and throat, ample folds, down to the ground, bare feet in slippers. Statuesque.*]

WINNIE [*tender voice*]. Stevie darling.

[STEVIE *who has been sitting in a corner, his back to the stage, head in hands, jumps up, advances to his sister with despairing face.*]

STEVIE. Winnie, it's awful, awful, awful!

WINNIE [*folds him to her breast a moment, then pushes him off*]. Stevie, you ought not to have come down.

STEVIE. You never told me not to. But I didn't scream. Only a little. And I love you, Winnie. Say, Winnie, you love me. [*Importunate.*] Say, Winnie.

WINNIE [*not looking at* STEVIE]. Love you? If I didn't love you I would die. [*Brusque.*] Of course I love you.

STEVIE [*fierce*]. Then you must punish these people.

WINNIE. What people? You go upstairs to bed, Stevie.

[MR. VERLOC *returns, heavy, moody. Carries in one hand a small shiny cash-box.*]

STEVIE [*despair*]. I couldn't go to sleep. [MR. VERLOC *stands still behind* WINNIE *and* STEVIE.]

WINNIE [*to* MR. VERLOC]. Look how they have upset that boy. Wicked folly I call it. We are not down-trodden slaves here.

STEVIE [*tremulous*]. I couldn't go to sleep. I would be afraid, Winnie.

WINNIE [*steady as before*]. And Mother's not here to sit up with him.

MR. VERLOC [*growl*]. It's that Yundt.

WINNIE. Horrid old man. Excite the boy like this.

MR. VERLOC [*growl*]. He has been exciting idiots all his life. Old Windbag. Never done a hand's turn since he was eighteen.

STEVIE [*suddenly*]. Eating human flesh. That can't be allowed, can't, can't. [*Dances with rage.* WINNIE *looks at him steadily, helpless.*]

MR. VERLOC [*behind his wife*]. Here's a circus for you.

STEVIE [*suddenly still*]. They must be punished. It's abominable. And Winnie, this is not the worst. They are tortured with hot irons too, and their hides burn and sizzle. [*Pauses. Repeats slowly.*] Burn —and—sizzle. [*And shudders.*]

WINNIE [*over her shoulder to* MR. VERLOC]. See that, Adolf?

[MR. VERLOC *shrugs his shoulders.*]

STEVIE [*nearly collapsed*]. Living people too. [*Despair.*] How can I go to bed? . . . Give me some work to do, Winnie.

WINNIE. The idea, at this time of the night. Go to bed, Stevie.

STEVIE [*excited*]. Work for all night. For every night. I'll never dare go to sleep.

MR. VERLOC [*behind* WINNIE'S *back*]. Here's a jolly go.

WINNIE. I never knew him out of hand like this.

STEVIE [*frail, fierce, for the moment dominating the situation*]. I want the wretches punished. It must be. Can you do it, Winnie? No? Of course you can't! You are only a girl. You don't care.

WINNIE [*first sign of distress*]. Stevie, if you won't believe in me, well then. . . .

STEVIE [*return of rage*]. The scoundrels must be punished. Every one must be punished! Who's going to do it? The police can do nothing. You told me so yourself, Winnie.

[WINNIE *nonplussed.*]

MR. VERLOC [*moves forward one step, hoarse*]. But I can. [STEVIE *startled.*] You go quietly to bed, young fellow. I will see to it.

STEVIE [*sudden awe*]. What? You? You yourself, Mr. Verloc?

MR. VERLOC [*another step forward*]. I tell you I will see to it! Now you go to bed.

STEVIE [*profoundly reverent, after the first astonishment*]. I am going this minute, Mr. Verloc. [*Exulting.*] As long as they are punished. Every bad man. All over the world.

[*At foot of stairs, already cheered-up, blows kiss to his sister. Exit.*]

WINNIE. Well, well, Adolf, you have done something. [*Submits to* MR. VERLOC'S *arms round her neck, but* MR. VERLOC *still preoccupied.*] I always told you that this boy would go through fire and water for you. And I must say you deserve it.

MR. VERLOC. Well then, give me a kiss.

WINNIE [*sullen, coquettish*]? Can't you wait the time of getting up the stairs? [*Gives kiss.*] After all these years.

MR. VERLOC [*sudden change of bearing, mutters bitterly*]. There is precious little time left—after all these years.

WINNIE [*to* MR. VERLOC'S *back*]. I say, Adolf. [MR. VERLOC *grunts.*] Isn't Mr. Michaelis going away to live in a cottage in the country, somewhere beyond Greenwich?

MR. VERLOC [*startled*]. Greenwich. [*Calmer.*] Yes. Greenwich. I have heard them say that his rich old lady has taken a cottage for him that way. Greenwich. Oh yes, he has got to write a book about his prison life. [*Fierce.*] Bag of soft fat.

WINNIE [*steady*]. He's a dear. Could you ask him to take Stevie to stay with him for a week or so? I want the child out of this for a while. He's thoroughly upset.

MR. VERLOC [*husky*]. What child? . . . Oh, yes, I could ask Michaelis. Certainly. Greenwich.

WINNIE. I'm sure he will do it for me. [*More brightly.*] He and I are great friends. And then, Adolf, you could take Stevie yourself down to him next week and then come back to me. You don't look well. You want to be taken care of for a few days.

MR. VERLOC [*peculiar tone*]. In the country. There may be something in that notion of yours. [*Heavy.*] Certainly.

WINNIE. It seems after all that you know how to manage that poor boy better than I. Now let us go to bed. What with Mother and Stevie I have had a bad time this afternoon. And you? What sort of day have you had?

MR. VERLOC [*grimly emphatic*]. I have had—a hell —of a day.

WINNIE [*calm*]. Go up first dear, I will turn out the gas. [MR. VERLOC, *cash-box in hand, overcoat on, goes ponderously up the stairs,* WINNIE, *by gas-jet, raises arm. Interrogative.*] All right, dear? May I put the light out?

MR. VERLOC [*deep voice down the stairs*]. Put it out.

CURTAIN

ACT II

Scene I

ROOM in a small café. Professor *sitting alone before small table, red-and-white cloth, before glass mug of beer. Another unoccupied little table, matchstand on it. Through narrow archway one or two heads of customers in main part may be seen. Mechanical piano, not visible, finishes valse tune.* Professor *small, frail, sallow, thin whiskers, fair. Large round spectacles. Clothes very ill-fitting, extremely shabby. Deplorable, heavy boots visible under table. Arms far through sleeves, no trace of cuffs. General aspect of inferior physique and poverty contrasted through the scene with speech and demeanour of supreme self-confidence.* Waiter, *white apron, appears for a moment in archway, nods over his shoulder, and* Ossipon *enters, folded newspaper in hand, sits down opposite* Professor, *puts elbow on paper, pushes cap to back of head. Piano stops.* Professor *takes sip of beer. They nod to each other.*

Ossipon. Were you out early to-day, Professor?

Professor. No. In bed till eleven.

Ossipon. Did you walk all the way from Islington?

Professor. No. Bus.

Ossipon [*restless movements, then still*]. Have you been sitting here long?

Professor. About an hour. [*Takes pull at beer. All movements firm, precise. Markedly so.*]

OSSIPON [*swings round, both elbows on table*]. Then maybe you don't know the news I have heard just now in the street. [PROFESSOR *shakes head.*] I never expected to find you here.

PROFESSOR. I sit here sometimes.

OSSIPON. It's wonderful that you of all people should know nothing of it. [PROFESSOR *indifferent.*] You, of all people [PROFESSOR *absolutely unconcerned.*] Are you in the habit of giving your explosive stuff to anybody who chooses to ask you for it? [*Confidential tone.*]

PROFESSOR. I never refuse my stuff to anybody, as long as I have a pinch by me. [*Pause.*] On principle.

OSSIPON. And you think it's a sound principle?

PROFESSOR. Perfectly. Always. Under any circumstances. Why should I think twice about it?

OSSIPON [*gasp*]. Do you mean that you would hand it over to a detective, if one came along to ask you for your wares?

PROFESSOR [*smiles*]. Let them try it on. But no fear. Not one of them will come near me.

OSSIPON. Why won't they?

PROFESSOR. Because they know very well that I never part with the last handful of what you call "my wares." I carry it always on me. [*Touches breast of coat.*] In a glass flask. Enough to turn this place into rubble and shambles.

OSSIPON [*interested*]. So I have been told.

PROFESSOR. But *they know.* I shall never be arrested. The game isn't good enough for any policeman

of them all. I mean one of the best, such as Inspector Heat for instance. To deal with a man like me you require sheer, naked, inglorious heroism.

OSSIPON [*slight impatience*]. Or recklessness—or simply ignorance. They have only to find somebody for the job who does not know you carry enough of your stuff about you to blow yourself and everything within sixty yards to pieces.

PROFESSOR. But that wouldn't be an arrest. Besides, it's not so easy as it looks.

OSSIPON. Bah! Suppose half a dozen of them jumped on you from behind, in the street, what could you do with your arms pinned to your sides? Nothing.

PROFESSOR. Oh yes, I could. I am seldom out in the dark. I walk always with my right hand closed round an india-rubber ball I have in my trouser pocket. I never let it go. The pressing of this ball would actuate the detonator of the glass bomb I carry in the breast pocket of my coat. [*Throws open coat.*] The tube leads like this, see!

OSSIPON. I see. Instantaneous, of course.

PROFESSOR. Sorry to say it isn't. About seven seconds must elapse from the moment I press the ball, to the explosion.

OSSIPON [*shudders*]. Ough! Wait seven seconds! Horrors! I should go crazy.

PROFESSOR. Wouldn't matter if you did. [*Vexed.*] The detonators are always the weak point with us. I am trying now to invent a detonator that would adjust itself to all conditions of action, and even to unexpected changes of condition. A variable, yet perfectly precise mechanism. A really intelligent detonator.

OSSIPON [*still appalled*]. Seven seconds! Ough! And then——

PROFESSOR. Nobody in this house could hope to escape. [*Cranes neck.*] I can see a man and a woman in the other room, going up the stairs now. They would vanish into mere shreds. [*Pause, air of calm sufficiency.*] In the last instance it's character alone that makes for one's safety. There are very few people in the world, with a character so well established as mine.

OSSIPON [*growl*]. I wonder how you manage it.

PROFESSOR. Force of personality. [*Sips beer.*] I have the means to make myself deadly, but that by itself is no protection. What is effective, is the absolute belief those people have in my will to use the means. That's their impression—therefore I *am* deadly.

OSSIPON. There are individuals of character amongst the police too.

PROFESSOR. Possibly, but it is a matter of degree, obviously, since I, for instance, am not impressed by them. They are my inferiors. Their character is built on traditional morality. It clings to social order. Mine stands free from everything artificial. They are bound in all sorts of conventions. They depend on life which is complex, and open to attack at every point. Whereas, I depend on death, which is simple and cannot be attacked. [*Very calm.*] My superiority is evident.

OSSIPON. A pretty transcendental way of putting it. I have heard Carl Yundt spout very much in the same way.

PROFESSOR [*ostentatious disdain*]. Carl Yundt has been a posturing shadow all his life. There are three

of you delegates for revolutionary propaganda, aren't there? The trouble with you is that you can no more think independently than any grocer or journalist of them all, and that you have no character whatever.

OSSIPON [*indignant*]. But what do you want from us? And what is it you are after, yourself?

PROFESSOR. A perfect detonator. What do you make that face for? You see, you can't even bear the mention of anything conclusive.

OSSIPON. I am not making a face.

PROFESSOR. You revolutionists are the slaves of convention as much as the police. The other day I met Chief Inspector Heat at the corner of Tottenham Court Road. He looked at me very steadily, but I did not look at him. He meant as little to me as your Carl Yundt. Like to like. The revolutionist and the policeman both come from the same basket. Revolution, legality—counter moves in the same game. The police plays its little game—so do you revolutionists. But I don't play! I work fourteen hours a day and go hungry sometimes. My experiments cost money and then I must do without food for a day or two. You are looking at my beer? Yes, I have had two glasses already and shall have another presently. This is a little holiday and I celebrate it alone. Why not? I have the grit to work alone. I have worked alone for years.

OSSIPON [*sneer*]. At the perfect detonator, eh?

PROFESSOR [*calm*]. Yes. It's a good enough definition. You couldn't find anything half so precise to define your activity with all your committees and delegations. It is *I* who am the true propagandist.

OSSIPON [*loftily*]. We won't discuss that point. [*Slower, watching* PROFESSOR.] I am afraid I will have to spoil your holiday though. A man has been blown up at Greenwich Park this morning. They have been yelling the news in the streets. I bought the paper and just ran in here. Never expected to see you. [*Displays paper.*] Here it is. Not much so far. Bomb in Greenwich Park. Foggy morning. Explosion felt as far as Romney Road and Park Place. Enormous hole in the ground. A lot of smashed roots and broken branches mixed up with fragments of a man's body. Blown to bits. H'm, h'm, that's all. The rest, merely newspaper gup. No doubt, a wicked attempt to blow up the Observatory, they say. That's hardly credible. [*Passes paper to* PROFESSOR *who puts it down abstractedly.*] The fragments of only one man you note. *Ergo,* blew himself up. Were you expecting that sort of move in this country? I hadn't the slightest notion. Under the present circumstances, it's simply criminal.

PROFESSOR [*lifts eyebrows, calm scorn*]. Criminal! What's that? What is crime? What can be the meaning of such an assertion?

OSSIPON [*exasperated*]. How am I to express myself? One must use the current words. This business may affect our position very badly in this country. Isn't that crime enough for you? I verily believe, you have been giving away some of your damned stuff lately. [PROFESSOR *lowers and raises head slowly.*] You have! [*Intense.*] No! And are you really handing it over at large like this, for the asking, to the first fool that comes along?

PROFESSOR. Just so. I would give the stuff with both my hands to every man, woman or child that

comes along. The damned social order has not been made with paper and ink, and I don't fancy that a propaganda of paper and ink will ever put an end to it —whatever you may think. You revolutionists—you plan the future. Whereas, what's needed is a clean sweep, and a clear start for an unfettered life. Therefore, I would shovel my stuff in heaps at the corners of the streets if I had enough for that. But as I haven't, I do my best to perfect a really dependable detonator.

OSSIPON. Oh, yes, your detonators. I shouldn't wonder if it was one of your detonators that made a clean sweep of the man in the park.

PROFESSOR [*vexation*]. My difficulty is precisely in experimenting practically with the various kinds. Detonators have to be tried, after all. Besides . . .

OSSIPON [*interrupting*]. Who could that fellow be? I assure you that we, in London, had no knowledge of anything being arranged. Couldn't you describe the person you last gave the stuff to?

PROFESSOR [*sip of beer, slowly*]. Describe him! I don't think there can be the slightest objection now. [OSSIPON *rises slightly in his seat.*] I can describe him to you in one word—Verloc.

OSSIPON [*drops back on seat suddenly*]. Verloc—impossible!

PROFESSOR [*two nods*]. That's the person. Surely this isn't a case of giving my stuff to the first fool that came along. He was a prominent member of your group, I understand.

OSSIPON [*distracted*]. Yes. No. Prominent. You don't know anything. You don't keep in touch with anybody, Professor. You . . . [*Controlling himself.*] Did he say anything to you, as to his intentions?

PROFESSOR [*calm*]. Told me it was going to be a demonstration against a building. I had hardly a sufficient quantity for a destructive result. But he was so earnest about it that I prepared for him a varnish can that could be carried open in the hand. The detonator was connected with the screw top of the can. It would act both to time and shock. Rather ingenious. I explained the system to him.

OSSIPON [*abrupt*]. What do you think has happened?

PROFESSOR. Can't tell. Screwed the top on tight which would make the connection, and then forgot the time. It was set for twenty minutes. On the other hand the time contact, having been made, a sharp shock would cause explosion at once. He either ran the time too close, or simply let the thing fall.

OSSIPON [*awed*]. Verloc! I hadn't seen him for a month. It seems impossible that he should be gone. [*Musing.*] Intellectually a nonentity. He certainly had a talent for keeping on terms with the police. Here, for instance, they did not look after him at all, except as a man with a shop of that sort. Do you know, Professor, that he was regularly married?

PROFESSOR [*gesture of indifference*]. Didn't know.

OSSIPON [*reflective*]. I have a notion that she must have had a little money, and that it was with that that he started that shop. Risky trade. He seemed to make it pay though.

PROFESSOR [*detached*]. Some men succeed. Inferior men.

OSSIPON. He was that.

PROFESSOR [*very calm*]. Whereas I have been treated all my life with revolting injustice.

OSSIPON [*angrily*]. The only policy for the revolutionary group, is to disclaim all connection with this damned freak. How to make the disclaimer convincing enough is what bothers me.

PROFESSOR [*sarcastic*]. You might ask the police for a testimonial of good conduct. They know where every one of you slept last night.

OSSIPON [*bitter*]. No doubt they are perfectly aware we had nothing to do with this. What they will *say* is another thing. And I don't even know how to lay hands on Michaelis at once.

PROFESSOR. Michaelis. He is in the country. Writing a book. I went to see him the other day. He filled a tiny cage of a room, which had a litter of paper on the floor. I noticed a half-eaten, raw carrot on the table near him. His breakfast. He lives on a diet of raw carrots and a little milk now.

OSSIPON [*listless*]. How does he look on it?

PROFESSOR. Angelic . . . I picked up a handful of his pages from the floor. Only fancy! he has divided his book into three parts, entitled, Faith, Hope, and Charity. He has planned a world like an enormous and nice hospital with gardens and flowers, in which the strong are to devote themselves to the nursing of the weak. [*Pause.*] Conceive you this folly, Ossipon! The weak! The source of all evil on this earth. I told him I had planned a world where the weak would be taken in hand for utter extermination. [*Finishes beer.*] Do you understand, Ossipon? The weak! They are our sinister masters, the flabby, the silly, the cowardly, the faint of heart and the slavish of mind. They have the power. They are the multitude. Theirs is the Kingdom of the earth. Exterminate! exterminate!

Follow me, Ossipon: First the blind must go; then the deaf and the dumb; then the halt and the maimed; every taint, every vice, every prejudice, every convention must meet its doom. [*Resumes his calm.*]

OSSIPON. And what remains? [*Knocks his glass on table.*]

PROFESSOR. I remain—if I am strong enough. [*Taps breast pocket of jacket.*] I am a force. But the time, the time! Give me time! Ah, that vile multitude! Sometimes I think they have everything on their side. [*Enter* WAITER.] Everything—even death —my own weapon.

OSSIPON [*absent-minded*]. Have some more beer.

PROFESSOR. Beer, you say! So be it! Let us drink and be merry, for we are strong and to-morrow we die.

OSSIPON [*holds up two fingers to* WAITER *who exits*]. I must organize a little meeting of comrades and get Michaelis to town. He will speak. The public has a sentimental regard for that fellow. Of course, he talks utter bosh but it goes down with them.

PROFESSOR [*grim*]. Like treacle. Why do you worry yourself about Verloc? Haven't you got anything better to do? Have you abandoned your collection of women? [*Jovial.*] They are the weak who feed the strong—what? [WAITER *brings beer. They nod and drink.*] Tell me, Ossipon, terrible man, has ever one of your victims killed herself for you, or are your triumphs so far incomplete? For blood alone puts a seal on greatness. Blood. Death. Look at history.

OSSIPON [*staring before him*]. You be damned.

PROFESSOR. Why damn me? Damnation is the hope of the weak whose theology has invented hell for

the strong. [*Chaffing.*] Ossipon, my feeling for you is friendly contempt. You couldn't kill a fly. [*Stands up, raises glass.*] To the destruction of what is! [*Finishes beer. Buttons coat.*]

OSSIPON [*remains seated, elbow on table*]. I am damned if you don't seem to kill everybody, simply by setting eyes on them. Look at that ass Verloc. You made him blow himself to bits.

PROFESSOR [*hands in pockets, ready to go*]. Not a bad death.

OSSIPON [*musingly*]. I wonder what that woman will do now. [PROFESSOR *motionless.*] He *was* an ass to leave such an imbecile business on my hands. Yundt has been laid up with bronchitis. It will finish him, I think. Michaelis is away, and probably will not even see a paper. He never looks at a paper.

PROFESSOR [*quietly sarcastic*]. They make him too sad, he says.

OSSIPON. And I am rather short of cash for the moment. . . . [*Slowly.*] I wonder what I had better do.

PROFESSOR [*grim*]. Do! Fasten yourself on the woman for all she is worth.

[*Mechanical piano begins to play.* OSSIPON *sits up suddenly.* PROFESSOR *moves towards archway.*]

SCENE II

Special Crimes Department. On the stage a large desk or writing table, with a lamp on it. Double inkstand. On the side of the desk, armchair, on the other side a chair, carpet under desk. ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER *seated sideways to desk,*

facing audience. Thin, tall, long face, small moustache, dark, silvery head. HEAT *stands on the other side of desk, facing it, profile to audience.*

ASSIST. COM. I did not expect to see you so soon. [*Turns head to look at* HEAT.]

HEAT [*a powerful well-set-up deliberate man, shaved cheeks and chin, long, drooping fair moustache. Dark overcoat. Umbrella and hat in hand*]. I started at eight and have been at it without a break. After what I have seen, I didn't seem to care for food. [*Lays hat, umbrella on chair.*]

ASSIST. COM. You come straight from there?

HEAT. Straight from the Greenwich Police Station, sir.

ASSIST. COM. Could you identify the man?

HEAT. Oh Lord, sir! Impossible. They had to collect him with a shovel. The coroner's jury will have a treat. [*Shudders slightly.*]

ASSIST. COM. And we shall have nothing to tell them about him. Person unknown, eh?

HEAT [*stolid*]. I am afraid it will have to be that, sir. Why, there were only the two legs below the knee, that they could pick up. The rest of him they had to gather into a waterproof sheet, all mixed up with a lot of gravel —no use talking about that. The thing he was carrying must have gone off right under his chest, when he stumbled and fell.

ASSIST. COM. You know that he was carrying something in his hand? [*Turns head to face audience again.*]

HEAT. Yes, sir. A gallon varnish tin. I got it all from the porters at Maze Hill Station. Only three people got out of that train. One of them was a fish-hawker, from Gravesend. The porters see him every day. Then there were two others: a heavy man of fifty . . .

ASSIST. COM. Did the porters tell you that?

HEAT. Tell me what, sir?

ASSIST. COM. His age.

HEAT [*after a pause*]. Well, I got that notion somehow from the ticket collector, who had a good look at him. He got out backwards, out of a third-class compartment, with a bright tin can in his hand. Looked like a small tradesman or a better sort of mechanic. He gave the can to carry to the slight, fair-haired, young chap who was with him. He gave up the two tickets at the barrier. A heavy fog was coming on at the time.

ASSIST. COM. We have had these fogs for a month. It's too awful.

HEAT. Yes, sir. Horrible weather.

ASSIST. COM. [*head leaning on hand*]. Horrible.

HEAT [*picking up the thread*]. An old woman noticed those two, near Maze Hill Station. That we know. Half an hour later, a local constable was standing at the door of the King William Street lodge, talking to the keeper. He saw what he says was like a heavy flash of lightning in the fog. He ran between the trees as fast as his legs would carry him, till he came to a big hole in the ground and—well, the rest of it. He got a labourer with a shovel to help him clear up the mess. No sign, of course, of the other man. It looks as if

he had brought the young chap to within a hundred yards of the Observatory wall, and then left him to do the job single-handed. Reckoning the time carefully, I judge that the other man might have been actually at Greenwich Park Station, ready to catch the next train up, at the very moment his friend destroyed himself so thoroughly.

ASSIST. COM. Very thoroughly, eh?

HEAT. There were enough bits of tin and fair hair left, to make it certain that it was the young chap.

ASSIST. COM. [*meditative*]. To remain unknown.

HEAT. What can you expect, sir? And moreover, he must have been a rank outsider. I consider it quite unfair outsiders taking a hand in that business.

ASSIST. COM. [*sideways to* HEAT, *head still leaning on hand*]. You said something about the legs being picked up. There were his boots on them.

HEAT [*slight movement*]. I didn't look at his boots because . . . [*Pauses.*] Well, to tell you the truth, sir, I had had about enough of it. I am not squeamish as a rule, but this turned me faint, I got away as quick as I could. And moreover, it wouldn't have been much use, anyway. He bought them probably second-hand, or third-hand for that matter.

ASSIST. COM. [*same attitude. Change of tone, but mildly equable*]. The worst feature of this affair, Inspector Heat, is that only a fortnight ago, I assured the Secretary of State that no outbreak of anarchist activity was to be apprehended. I made that statement on your authority, naturally. Assistant commissioners come and go, as you know by experience.

HEAT [*appreciative*]. Yes, sir, I have seen some change in my time.

ASSIST. COM. [*continuing*]. But Chief Inspector Heat remains. You are our greatest expert. You assured me that there wasn't one of them that our Department couldn't lay hands on at any time of the day or night. And I repeated that to the Secretary of State. He was very pleased. Pleased enough to smile. If you had seen that smile, Inspector Heat, the recollection of it would be very annoying to you, now.

HEAT. I am vexed enough as it is, sir, but gentlemen like Sir William forget that you may watch an anarchist inch by inch for years, but there is bound to come a moment when you lose sight and touch of him for a few hours, and then some confounded accident is sure to happen. When I was younger I had charge of burglary and murder cases, and I assure you, sir, I only wish I could go back again. . . .

ASSIST. COM. Go back to your thieves?

HEAT. Anyway, one can understand what they are after. Whereas with this anarchist lot you may think and think. . . . I don't believe they know themselves what they are after. They are just making themselves a nuisance, and even at that, they are but bunglers. Why, if the thieves didn't know their trade better they would starve.

ASSIST. COM. [*slight smile but without looking at* HEAT]. I believe you were very successful in the world of thieves.

HEAT [*instant of hesitation*]. I will tell you how it was, sir. I was respected. I knew them and they knew me. They played their game and I played my game, and they could not deny that I played it fair. It takes a man to make a good burglar, but any damn

fool may turn terrorist from one day to another. That lot don't know what the word "fair" means. [*Slightly animated.*] The other evening I met one of them in a little street. He was a fellow they call the Professor. He carries about half a pound of his best explosive in his pocket, they say. Boasts of it. [*Contemptuous.*] I don't know what he was doing there. Slinking home, probably. He hires a room from two old maids, dressmakers, Islington way. If the two old girls knew who they had got there, they would die in fits. He is really one of the kill-at-any-price lunatics. He backed into the corner of a doorway, and says he to me: "Why don't you arrest me now; fine opportunity?" I told him that when I wanted him, I would know where to find him. And then, I promised him, I would handle him without gloves, exactly as if he were a decent thief. He looked a cornered, starved rat of a fellow. "If you lay your hands on me," says he, "we will get so mixed up that they will have to bury us in the same grave." I said to him: "Those are tales to scare little children with." [*Disgusted.*] Pah, that's the sort of talk one gets from that lot. That's their greatest man!

ASSIST. COM. [*sitting very still, nursing cheek in hand. Even tone*]. He had nothing to do with this regrettable affair.

HEAT [*slight hesitation*]. Strictly speaking, nothing whatever.

ASSIST. COM. [*as before*]. Ah, strictly speaking. What does that mean?

HEAT. Mean, sir? I mean he is constantly watched. We know all his little habits. Can't bring him into this. In fact, I may tell you at once, that none of the

lot that we are looking after, had anything to do with this.

ASSIST. COM. Positively?

HEAT. Yes, sir. [*Pause.*] Except one, perhaps. We have a pretty correct notion where every one of them slept the night before.

ASSIST. COM. [*weary*]. That's excellent, as far as it goes. Yes, obviously there were two men. . . . You are sure there were two men.

HEAT. Positive, sir. But how is one to guard oneself if rank outsiders begin to take a hand in the game?

ASSIST. COM. [*lowers arm gently on desk*]. Two outsiders.

HEAT [*stolid*]. That's what we must believe, sir.

ASSIST. COM. One of them is not likely to give us trouble again.

HEAT [*fidgety*]. No, sir.

ASSIST. COM. [*musingly*]. Two men, let us call them outsiders, dropped from the blue, to perpetrate this perfectly futile outrage, which nevertheless is extremely vexing, extremely annoying, and very serious, from the fact that Sir William has been made angry. He told me that our ideas of efficiency here, seemed to consist of making the Secretary of State look a fool. I had a very unpleasant interview. Very unpleasant indeed.

HEAT. That was very unjust, sir. Very unjust to the Department. [*Calm.*] In this case anyhow. [*Discreet smile.*] Gentlemen like Sir William don't quite understand that not everything is fit to be told, and to speak the whole truth, sir, they are so high up that they are not fit to hear everything. What the people at the top never get to know, would make a long story.

For instance, there are things that don't happen. Just missed happening, I mean. They don't hear of them. I myself have squashed things that if I hadn't held my tongue . . .

ASSIST. COM. You have all a devoted servant's mistrust of your superiors, I see.

HEAT. Well sir, it's we who do the work. A man must have his own way sometimes. Those at the top don't always understand that. They have their own troubles, I daresay. High matters. But this I must say for myself, that I often took personal risks; yes, sir, risks of my good name being lost for the sake of the work.

ASSIST. COM. The loftiest kind of zeal, this. It is generally admitted that you made the reputation of this Department.

HEAT. Not alone, sir. I have had to do with gentlemen under whom it was a pride and a pleasure to work.

ASSIST. COM. Yes. I am a new man here but I feel sure that you have not wasted your morning altogether, in Greenwich.

HEAT. Not altogether. [*Hesitation.*]

ASSIST. COM. Come, Inspector Heat. Don't try to keep *me* in the dark. Of course, in the end everything gets reduced to writing. But meantime, let us regard this conversation as unofficial. [HEAT, *a little startled.*] You mentioned somebody you connect with this affair. Now, between ourselves, who is it?

HEAT. The ex-convict Michaelis.

ASSIST. COM. Oh, nonsense.

HEAT [*slightly bitter*]. He's a public pet, I know. But it's difficult to resist evidence.

ASSIST. COM. Evidence! You got evidence against Michaelis?

HEAT. Enough for us to deal with a convict out on license. I don't say it's much. Here are the two railway tickets those fellows gave up. [*Hands over two railway tickets to* ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER *who extends his hand to take them, looks at them and lays them on the table.*]

ASSIST. COM. It's the name of some small station, isn't it? Strange they should have come from there.

HEAT. Not so strange if you know, sir, that Michaelis's cottage is a short half mile from it. He is supposed to be writing a book there.

ASSIST. COM. Yes, I have heard of that. [*Pause.*] That's awkward.

HEAT. A man like that is fair game.

ASSIST. COM. [*changes position facing* HEAT *square across writing-table. Slight change of tone*]. Come, Inspector Heat. Was there nothing else?

HEAT [*on defensive*]. There was the body of a man blown to bits.

ASSIST. COM. Yes, the unknown. I have an idea that you didn't examine *that* very closely.

HEAT. I was glad to get away as quick as I could, sir. Anybody would have been. Of course, if there is a reason of which I know nothing for not interfering with the convict Michaelis perhaps it's just as well I didn't start the police after him.

ASSIST. COM. No reason whatever that I know of. You're finessing with me. It's highly improper on your part and what's worse it's also unfair, you know. Really I am surprised. [*Smooth tone.*] Those tickets are all very well. Let us come now to what you discovered on the spot.

HEAT [*staring hard basilisk stare. Movement of checked indignation. Visible effort*]. I am coming now to that part of my investigation, sir.

ASSIST. COM. That's right. Well, what have you brought away from it? [*Kindly tone.*]

HEAT [*recovered. Assuming businesslike tone*]. I have brought away an address. [*Produces from pocket ragged piece of dark blue cloth.*] This is the collar of the overcoat the fellow who got himself blown up was wearing. Of course the overcoat might not have been his, and it might even have been stolen, but . . . [*Steps up to table, smoothes cloth with hand.*] See, sir? There's a piece of linen sewn on with an address written on it in marking-ink.

ASSIST. COM. By Jove! [*Pause.*] I understand now why you didn't trouble about his boots. What an extraordinary thing! Why should he have gone about labelled like this?

HEAT. I once knew an old gentleman who had his address on all his coats. He was afraid of losing his memory suddenly.

ASSIST. COM. [*who has been looking at the piece of cloth. Reads*]. 32 Brett Street. [*Comments.*] A rather disreputable neighbourhood. [*Looks hard at* HEAT.] What is 32 Brett Street?

HEAT [*visible effort*]. It's a shop, sir. A small shop.

ASSIST. COM. I have a pretty good idea what sort of commerce that must be. You haven't been there yet, have you?

HEAT. No, sir. [*Rather sulky.*] I know all about it. [*Pause.*] I know the man who keeps it. I have known him for years. He associates with a lot of anarchists. He has been of use to me more than once. [*Noticing the intensely scrutinizing gaze of* ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER.] I have got to do my work in any way that offers, sir.

ASSIST. COM. The Department has no record of that man?

HEAT. No, sir.

ASSIST. COM. Was any of my predecessors aware of what you have told me now? [*Puts elbows on table and clasps hands before face.*]

HEAT. No, sir. What would have been the good? A man like that can't very well be produced publicly. I knew who he was and I made use of him—for the public good.

ASSIST. COM. [*interrogative but gentle*]. You think that sort of private connection consistent with your public character?

HEAT. Perfectly, sir. Quite proper. Let me take the liberty to tell you, sir, that I am looked upon as a man who knows his duty. A personal friend of mine in the French police gave me the hint years ago that the fellow was an Embassy spy. Private friendship, private information, private use of it—that's how I look on it.

ASSIST. COM. [*slowly*]. I see. [*Leans cheek on joined hands.*] Well, then, between you and me, pri-

vately you know—how long have you been in private touch with this Embassy spy?

HEAT [*innocently*]. Long before the time of the Assistant Commissioner that was here before you, sir. [*Businesslike.*] The first time I saw him was more than seven years ago. I had charge then of two Imperial Highnesses and the Imperial Chancellor on a visit here who were staying at the Embassy. Baron Stott-Wartenheim was Ambassador then. A very nervous old gentleman. One evening two days before the Guildhall banquet, he sent me word he wanted to see me very particularly. I was downstairs. The carriages were at the door to take the Imperial Highnesses and the Chancellor to the opera. However I ran up and found the late Baron in his bedroom in a great state, walking up and down. He assured me he had the greatest confidence in our police, but a man had just come over from Paris and he wanted me to hear what that man had to say. With that he takes me into his bathroom and there I see a big fellow sitting on a chair and holding his hat and stick in one hand. The Baron said to him in French: "Speak, my friend." Well, it was very startling news. I just turned my head for a moment to speak to the Baron and when I turned round again, lo and behold, the fellow was gone like a ghost. Got up quietly behind my back and sneaked out. There was no time to run after him. I had to hurry down the big staircase with the Baron and see the Imperial party start for the opera. I acted on the information of course. Very likely it saved us from very ugly trouble on the day of the banquet.

ASSIST. COM [*interested*]. Very likely. [*Nods.*] Well?

HEAT [*conversational*]. A few months afterwards I saw in the Strand a man I seemed to know coming out

in a hurry from a jeweller's shop. I had one of our men with me and I just told him to find out something about this fellow and report. The very next day I was told that the fellow had married his landlady's daughter at a registry office and had gone to Margate for a week. Our man had watched the luggage put on the roof of the cab and had noticed some old Paris labels on a Gladstone bag. All this stuck in my mind somehow; so the very next time I went to Paris on duty I spoke to a friend of mine in the Paris police. He thought that it must be a certain Verloc, a well-known hanger-on to the Revolutionary Red Committee. They had an idea in Paris that he might have been a secret agent of one of the foreign embassies. This woke up my memory. He *was* the fellow I had seen in the Baron's bathroom. Afterwards my Paris friend ferreted out that man's complete record for me. But I don't suppose you want to hear his history, sir.

ASSIST. COM. Your relations with that personage are the only thing that interests me now.

HEAT [*slightly bitter*]. Nothing official about them, sir. One evening I dropped into his shop and reminded him of our first meeting. He told me that he was married and settled and all he wanted was not to be interfered with in his little business. I took it upon myself to promise him that as long as he didn't get mixed up with anything outrageous the police would take no notice of his shop. That was worth something to him, because a hint from us to the Custom-house people would have got some of the packages he gets from Brussels opened in Dover, with confiscation to follow for certain.

ASSIST. COM. That's a very precarious trade. Why did he go in for that?

HEAT. Most likely got a connection on the Continent with people who deal in such wares. He's a lazy dog too, like most of them anarchists.

ASSIST. COM. What do you get from him in exchange for your protection?

HEAT [*reserved*]. What I get wouldn't be much good to anybody but myself. One has got to know a good deal beforehand to make use of that sort of information. [ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER *nods.*] I haven't spoken to him three times in the last two years. [ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER *nods.*] I drop him an unsigned note and he answers me in the same way at my private address. [ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER *nods.*] Whenever I had reason to think there was anything in the wind I always found he could tell me something worth knowing.

ASSIST. COM. [*significantly*]. He failed you this time.

HEAT. Neither had I wind of anything in any other way. I asked him nothing, so he could tell me nothing. It isn't as if he was in our pay.

ASSIST. COM. No. He is a secret agent in the pay of a foreign government. Employed to organize political crime most likely. Really those Embassy people are too impossible. What do they mean by importing their methods of Crim-Tartary here? It's perfectly devilish.

HEAT. When it comes to that, sir, I would deal with the devil himself and take the consequences.

ASSIST. COM. Your idea of secrecy seems to be to keep the chief of your department in the dark. That's stretching it a little too far, isn't it? [*Sharply.*] He lives over his shop?

HEAT [*assumed indifference*]. Who? Verloc? Oh yes. They live over the shop. The wife's mother I fancy lives with them. But I haven't been near the place for years. My opinion is that he knows nothing of this affair.

ASSIST. COM. How do you account for the address on this? [*Points finger at cloth rag on table.*]

HEAT. I don't account for it at all, sir. It can't be explained by what I know privately.

ASSIST. COM. There is something under the surface of this affair which strikes me as exceptional. I think, Inspector Heat, that this case must be dealt with in a special way.

HEAT [*very stolid*]. Yes, sir.

ASSIST. COM. [*irritable*]. These fellows are a perfect pest.

HEAT [*with deep feeling*]. That's what I have always said, sir.

ASSIST. COM. [*pauses, looks hard at* HEAT]. Whom are you thinking about, Chief Inspector?

HEAT. Why, of those terrorists.

ASSIST. COM. I was thinking of secret agents. I would like to get at the people who employ them and give them a rap on the knuckles—something that they would remember.

HEAT [*obstinately*]. I still think that the man who had most to do with this will turn out to be Michaelis.

ASSIST. COM. That would make the case very simple.

HEAT. Yes, sir.

ASSIST. COM. Well, you know, Inspector Heat, I don't feel that it is simple. I intend to see the Secretary of State at once, and . . .

HEAT [*extreme and ominous deference*]. Am I to understand, sir, that there is the idea of taking the case out of my hands?

ASSIST. COM. [*indulgent*]. Now, you know, this is a most improper thing for you to have said, Inspector Heat. But I will answer you. No. Nothing of the kind. All I have to tell you now, officially, is to make no move of any kind for the next twelve hours.

HEAT. Officially?

ASSIST. COM. Oh yes. [*Change of tone.*] You may follow the Michaelis track. You are still thinking of Michaelis.

HEAT. Yes, sir. It's a plain way; a blind man could not make a mistake and Michaelis is fair game.

ASSIST. COM. [*amused*]. Oh, by the bye, I can tell you where Michaelis will spend this evening. In Belgrave Square. Of course you know about Michaelis's friendship with a great lady?

HEAT [*sour*]. All the world knows of it, sir. There is no accounting for their tastes . . . or for their whims either.

ASSIST. COM. I know this because I have been asked to dine at her house. But I have the notion, Inspector Heat, that I will have to go without my dinner to-day.

HEAT [*extremely stolid*]. That is as you please, sir.

ASSIST. COM. [*gets up brusquely*]. That's all, Chief Inspector. I haven't any time to lose. [*Goes out hurriedly—right.*]

HEAT [*stares after him. Takes step forward, picks up cloth rag off desk murmuring viciously the words*]. Unofficial, indeed! [*Exit left.*]

ASSIST. COM. [*enters immediately, hat on head, gloves in hand, proceeds to look all over writing-table. Glances about floor*]. Gone! [*Laugh.*] It's like his damned impudence.

[*Takes quick step to left as if to go after* HEAT—*then checks himself and makes gestures as if after all it didn't matter.*]

CURTAIN

ACT III

The Upper World

LADY MABEL'S drawing-room, well lighted. Couch to right. Lady Mabel *black dinner dress, a little old lace, white hair, young eyes. Couch, old gold brocade, on which* Maid *is settling* Lady Mabel. *Three women guests in room. Just come in.*

Lady Mabel. Thank you. Now this light shawl over my feet, please.

Maid. Mr. Michaelis is wandering about in the hall, my lady. I saw him just now.

Lady Mabel. A man who has spent so many years in prison cannot be like other people.

Maid. He is very unassuming. I am sure he will sit down on the stairs as quiet as can be.

Lady Mabel. His greatest need is sympathy.

Maid. Indeed one can't help liking him, my lady.

Lady Mabel. He can't be left there. He had better join us here at once.

Maid [*small laugh*]. It would be charity to let him. The poor man looks so lost down there.

Lady Mabel. Tell him I want to have a quiet talk with him here.

[*Exit* Maid. Lady Mabel *reclines on elbow. Woman's voice in the group.*]

1ST WOMAN'S VOICE. You have read about the bomb outrage in Greenwich Park?

2ND WOMAN'S VOICE. No, I have only just heard. Thank God there were no victims.

1ST WOMAN'S VOICE. The horrid anarchist blew himself up apparently. How stupid of him. The man who took me in to dinner—I didn't catch his name. . . .

3RD WOMAN'S VOICE. Mr. Vladimir, First Secretary of an Embassy.

1ST WOMAN'S VOICE. Oh! Indeed! He was very interesting about it. He explained to me that the very stupidity of this outrage makes it extremely signficant. Most serious!

3RD WOMAN'S VOICE [*high pitched*]. Serious! I should think so. Poor Sir George had a narrow escape.

1ST WOMAN'S VOICE. The Astronomer Royal? Was he anywhere near?

3RD WOMAN'S VOICE. I suppose so. Such a charming man. Did you ever hear him lecture? I never went. Astronomy is so difficult, so remote from one's other interests.

1ST WOMAN'S VOICE. Isn't it? I can't see how it can have any connection with politics. Those anarchists must be simply mad. Mad people are the most dangerous of all.

[MICHAELIS *enters and crosses room to couch. Sudden pause in the voices.*]

1ST WOMAN'S VOICE. Dear Lady Mabel pushes eccentricity too far.

3RD WOMAN'S VOICE. Oh, don't say that. It is so amusing.

[*They move to second plan and sit down together.* MICHAELIS *shakes hands with* LADY MABEL *and sits down carefully in armchair at foot of couch. Benign.*]

MICH. I heard voices behind the doors and so I stayed in the hall.

LADY MABEL. I couldn't have guessed you were shy, Mr. Michaelis.

MICH. [*placid*]. It isn't exactly that, but I am not used to see many faces at once. I thought you would be alone this evening, ma'am.

LADY MABEL. It isn't necessary to do it really, but why don't you address me as Lady Mabel like my other friends?

MICH. It seems so familiar to use your Christian name.

LADY MABEL. Is that the reason? I thought you didn't recognize social distinctions.

MICH. It isn't exactly that. [*Benevolent smile.*] The only great man I knew for years and years was the Governor of the jail. There were two in my time.

LADY MABEL. Your awful time!

MICH. [*placid*]. You see, the worst of it was that I was so young when they locked me up. There were my old people and the girl that was to marry me. We had just made up our minds to set up a home. There were all the young fellows, chums that one was fond of. Thoughtless perhaps. [*Pause.*] The poor haven't got much time to think.

LADY MABEL. No . . . I suppose not.

MICH. At first their faces crowded on me rather; till I couldn't breathe—for a long long time. Then something seemed to go within me and then they all went too and I had nothing but my own company. [*Pause.*] For years, and years.

LADY MABEL [*tone of awe*]. This is appalling.

MICH. [*placidly concerned*]. Don't upset yourself—there's a dear. You don't quite understand. In all those years I was locked up in a cell, but it was you that was in prison; your kind and charitable soul. It is in prison yet. [*Makes a circular gesture indicating the room.*] I would give something to make you free.

LADY MABEL. I am a crippled old woman.

MICH. [*bends forward in seat, seizes* LADY MABEL'S *hand in both his hands. Impulsive deep feeling in voice*]. I do feel for you. I do indeed, ma'am—Mabel—Lady Mabel. [*Pause.*] I get confused in my head a little, sometimes.

LADY MABEL. Call me what you like. You may well do that. I won't call myself sinful to you because I am not a canting old woman. But, truly, I do not feel myself a prisoner in this world which has been so cruel and unjust to you.

MICH. [*placidly earnest, leans forward a little*]. I wish no evil to the world.

LADY MABEL. What? No ruin? No destruction?

MICH. No, no. It isn't that, ma'am—Lady Mabel. [*Pause.*] Not exactly.

LADY MABEL. Not exactly! Well, really, I don't care what happens; but I love to watch what the world

is coming to. This world. And what do you think its end will be? A lake of pitch and brimstone?

MICH. Poor woman! Poor woman! What a life you must have had in *your* prison to talk like that. [*Very placid.*] I had a vision of this poor earth blossoming in the glorious firmament like a flower full of sweet honey for every bee. [*Abrupt pause.*] I used to have visions in my cell, you know.

LADY MABEL [*even voice*]. I haven't the slightest doubt you had.

MICH. I am trying to set down all this in my book. It's difficult to get it exactly right.

LADY MABEL. But you are getting on with it?

MICH. Yes, I suppose I am. There's a big lot done. Writing's no trouble to me.

LADY MABEL. I hope you have been comfortable in the cottage.

MICH. I was very happy. I like to be alone. I am setting down now things about Justice and Retribution.

LADY MABEL. What things? Visions?

MICH. Yes. Visions and—and thoughts. I forget the time for days together. I have had such a nice lad staying with me. Not exactly the son of a friend. But my friend is like a father to him. He looked after me a bit. Ah, he has a great notion of justice and retribution, that boy! And so young too, eighteen or so, and they say not exactly right. . . . [*Touches forehead with finger.*] But I don't see it! Of course any tale of the world's cruelty makes him get excited. Anger! Punishment! When he is older he will know better, he

will have more hope. It was pleasant to have him about.

LADY MABEL. I can't tell you how glad I am to hear you have been comfortable and not altogether alone during this last month.

MICH. You have been good to me.

LADY MABEL. You mustn't talk like this. The world can never make up to you. . . . [MICHAELIS *raises hand placidly.*]

MICH. It isn't exactly me. . . . There are millions of them and there is no such another woman as you. Well, well. . . . I am sorry to say my friend came along early this morning and took that boy away. I was up and at my writing already. My friend shouted up the staircase that they were going. I didn't even see the dear lad. Something made me restless and so when I got your letter at noon I just came up. A comrade will give me a shake-down for the night, no doubt, and to-morrow I'll go back. I can't keep away for long from that blessed writing. [*Dreamily.*] Justice and Retribution.

LADY MABEL. You will take a humane view of both. That I am sure of. I suppose you have heard of the dynamite outrage in Greenwich Park? [*Tentatively.*] Do you really think that that sort of thing . . .

MICH. [*with feeling*]. I wish I had never heard of it. It's difficult to see the exact way. But there is a way!

LADY MABEL. Yes. There is. Love and forbearance.

[*During the last few replicas three men have entered the room amongst them* MR. VLADIMIR. *Then* ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER *comes in. Approaches couch*

and seeing the two absorbed in conversation waits with his hand on the back of empty armchair.]

LADY MABEL [*raises her eyes*]. Oh it's you, Harold. [*Pause, slightly embarrassed.*] This is Mr. Michaelis. [MICHAELIS *gets up very friendly.*]

MICH. How do you do; how do you do! [*They shake hands. Turns to* LADY MABEL *and bends over the couch.*] Good-night, dear friend. I shall smoke my evening pipe in the streets. You are a great soul. Good-night. [*Moves off across the room where everybody turns to look at him.*]

LADY MABEL. Good-bye.

ASSIST. COM. [*smiling, takes seat in armchair*]. This is the only place I should think in the whole world where a Commissioner of Police could meet a convict.

LADY MABEL [*with animation*]. And that officially is supposed to be a terrorist. What nonsense!

ASSIST. COM [*gentle*]. Not a dangerous one, perhaps.

LADY MABEL. Not dangerous! I should think not indeed. He is a mere believer. It's the temperament of a saint. And they kept him shut up for twenty years. One shudders at the stupidity of it. And now they have let him out his people are all dead, his friends are gone, the girl he was to marry has disappeared. He told me it was the hardest thing of all. He has lost the skill necessary for his manual occupation. He speaks of all this with the sweetest patience. If that's the stuff revolutionists are made of some of us may well go on our knees to them. [*All faces turn towards couch with smiles.*] The poor creature is obviously no longer able to take care of himself. Somebody must look after him.

A Man [*lean face, grey moustache, approaches couch. Soldierly voice*]. He should be recommended to follow a treatment of some sort. Over eighteen stone, and not five foot six. [*With feeling.*] The man is virtually a cripple.

Woman's Voice. Monstrous.

Another Woman's Voice. Most painful to see.

Another Man's Voice [*mincingly*]. Absolutely grotesque.

Lady Mabel. I was anxious to send him to Marienbad this year, but the police objected because of the Prince, who was taking his cure there. As though poor Michaelis could poison the air by breathing in it. [*All faces grave; groups re-form at back of stage.*]

Assist. Com. Did you have him to dinner?

Lady Mabel. No, he came late—like you. But then you at least did send a note. A most exciting little note about this Greenwich outrage. Tell me, what is it, this horror?

Assist. Com. It may yet become a *cause célèbre.*

Lady Mabel [*eager*]. Do tell me. I am extremely curious. I believe it is curiosity that keeps me alive. But what detained you? What had you to do to keep you away?

Assist. Com. To begin with I had to do a very difficult thing.

Lady Mabel. And what was that?

Assist. Com. I had to smooth down Sir William. He was furious with the Department.

Lady Mabel. I remember him in his young days. He was an admirable dancer. Better than any one.

He seemed to live for it. It was quite extraordinary. [*Musing tones.*] And now he is Secretary of State! Quite an ordinary sort of thing.

ASSIST. COM. Yes. But he can be extraordinarily angry. He looked much more dangerous than any terrorist could ever be. However . . .

LADY MABEL. You have been clever enough to placate him.

ASSIST. COM. No. I only managed to turn his anger into another channel.

LADY MABEL. Very well. But why didn't you come to dinner after you had done that?

ASSIST. COM. You forget the other things I had to do. Before I went to see Sir William I had a long interview with Chief Inspector Heat. The result was that I shocked and disgusted him.

LADY MABEL. He's a great detective.

ASSIST. COM. He has a great reputation. I don't say it is undeserved. I am afraid I made for myself an enemy there.

LADY MABEL. Why? How?

ASSIST. COM. I will tell you. He was reporting to me on his investigation of this case and at last he let out something which made me think of you.

LADY MABEL. Of me? What have I to do with the case?

ASSIST. COM. It's very simple. He tried to drag Michaelis into it.

LADY MABEL. Impossible.

ASSIST. COM. Just possible. I was startled. I thought to myself that if Heat had his way Michaelis would be laid hold of again and you would never forgive me.

LADY MABEL [*impulsively*]. Never.

ASSIST. COM. Inspector Heat thinks that a man of that sort has no business to be at large.

LADY MABEL. That's sheer wickedness.

ASSIST. COM. No. It's the Departmental point of view. However my affection for you sharpened my wits. We fenced for a bit and then Heat ended by admitting to me that he had gathered in Greenwich another indication. A bit of an overcoat with an address on it. A trifle. But it led Inspector Heat to talk to me about a certain Embassy spy. You know my hatred of spies and informers and still more for the people who employ them. That a secret agent will fabricate his information is a mere commonplace. They are a pest—but the people who employ them are a still greater pest! I made up my mind to ask Sir William to let me deal personally with this man Verloc, the secret agent with whom Inspector Heat had been in touch for several years. [*Pause.*] Funny to think that the reputation of Chief Inspector Heat of the Special Crimes Department is perhaps the work of Mr. Verloc, an obscure Embassy spy.

LADY MABEL. What a strange thing. And did you actually go yourself? Were you disguised?

ASSIST. COM. Well, I did not go in these clothes. I had on a shabby jacket and a soft felt hat, very old too. Yes I started in search of that secret agent. At last I found my way into the parlour of a very dark, small public house.

LADY MABEL. And what did you find there?

ASSIST. COM. Physically, a bulky sort of man vaguely resembling Chief Inspector Heat. He took me at first for an anarchist from the continent.

LADY MABEL [*shocked*]. Harold!

ASSIST. COM. [*resigned voice*]. I suppose there must be something in my appearance. Moreover the way I addressed him at first made it excusable. He had been sitting in that hole, solitary, ever since eleven o'clock when he returned from Greenwich. When I told him I wished to speak to him about the bomb outrage he became speechless with fright and astonishment. He couldn't possibly imagine by any effort of mind how on earth his connection with it was known so soon or even at all.

LADY MABEL. Harold, you are telling me most unheard-of things.

[*Sounds of well-bred laughter from a group.*]

ASSIST. COM. He is certainly the agent of an Embassy. [*Bending over couch.*] And its First Secretary is in your drawing-room now. He can be very amusing.

LADY MABEL. What! Mr. Vladimir? It's perfectly shocking.

ASSIST. COM. [*glance over shoulder*]. He is having a great success.

LADY MABEL [*distractedly*]. One of the wittiest men. . . .

[*More sounds of laughter.*]

ASSIST. COM. Evidently. He can also it seems be a very terrible bully. He drove that spy almost crazy

with his menaces. Did it ever occur to you, Lady Mabel, what a vulnerable person a secret agent is?

LADY MABEL. Yes. No. . . . I have never in my life given a thought to such people.

ASSIST. COM. Well, that secret agent was in a state of moral and physical collapse which surprised me. He had worked up the feelings of a poor half-witted boy to throw that bomb as a sort of retribution for social injustice. He didn't expect the accident. It upset him terribly. We are here faced by a domestic situation, dear Lady Mabel. The man has a wife. The boy was her brother.

LADY MABEL. A secret agent! A wife! Is she an anarchist, or a terrorist, or whatever you call these people, too?

ASSIST. COM. I don't know. It seems incredible that she should know his real character. A secret agent is a being apart. It's the nearest thing to living under a curse. A secret curse.

LADY MABEL [*interested*]. It didn't occur to me. I had no idea. Have such people any human feelings at all—I wonder.

ASSIST. COM. At bottom I imagine they must be very commonplace. [*Pause.*] Like the great mass of mankind. What struck me as peculiar was that he couldn't keep her out of the conversation.

LADY MABEL. You mean his wife? Could it be that he is very much attached to her?

ASSIST. COM. Well, that in itself would not be so peculiar. Attached to her? Very likely. She is the only possession that he may really call his own. Everything else he possesses in the world, and even his life

itself, are at the mercy of a whispered hint, of an accidental indiscretion, of a rash word. For he is a secret agent! The very breath in his body depends on his employers. What was peculiar was seemingly his conviction that he was loved for himself.

LADY MABEL [*amazed*]. Loved for himself! Did he tell you this in so many words?

ASSIST. COM. Well, no. Still I got the impression. Most men at some time or other feel the need of confession. This Verloc, as soon as he understood who I was, flung himself, figuratively speaking, on my breast. His one idea was revenge.

LADY MABEL. And you? What did you do?

ASSIST. COM. I am a hunter of criminals. I feel for my game. I advised him to go home and make all his arrangements, and told him I would see him later. Then I went again to Sir William with my, or rather Verloc's, tale. Sir William was a brick.

LADY MABEL [*sigh*]. He danced divinely.

ASSIST. COM. Yes. But was there ever such another Secretary of State! He is a brick because he has given me my head. Mr. Verloc will be arrested tomorrow. There will be a trial, with startling disclosures. A *cause célèbre*. Rather! The secretary of a great embassy, discovered at the bottom of a terrorist outrage! Such a thing was never heard of . . . [*Calming down.*] I wouldn't say it has never happened.

LADY MABEL. My dear Harold, it's you who are a great detective. What an awful light this throws . . .

ASSIST. COM. Yes. And I shall watch it all from the shadow of the office. I managed to break away from my desk for a few hours. In another hour or so,

after I have seen Mr. Verloc once more, I shall go back to it. . . . [*Pause.*] For the rest of my days. That sort of thing does not happen twice in one's life.

LADY MABEL. But won't your man run away?

ASSIST. COM. No, Lady Mabel, he will not run away. Prison for a couple of years is the safest place for him. Indeed, he longs for it. Afterwards he will disappear in the way such men vanish.

LADY MABEL. With that woman?

ASSIST. COM. With—or without. It'll depend on how much he is loved. [*Pause. Grim.*] It occurs to me that Mr. Vladimir will vanish even before Mr. Verloc. The London clubs and drawing rooms will not know Mr. Vladimir much longer.

[*A couple which has been waiting during the last three replicas, approaches to take leave.* ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER *gets up. General leave-taking. Murmurs, handshakes, bows. During that time* MR. VLADIMIR *and* LADY GUEST *remain seated together extreme left of stage. As others go out they rise and approach the couch.*]

ASSIST. COM. [*to* LADY MABEL]. I am sure everybody is scandalized at the way I have been monopolizing you this evening. Did you notice how everybody looked intrigued by our long conference?

LADY MABEL. They may think what they like. My eccentricity is well known. [MR. VLADIMIR *and* LADY GUEST *very close to couch.*] I believe you have met before. [ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER *and* MR. VLADIMIR *bow to each other.*]

MR. VLAD. I had the pleasure—once.

LADY GUEST [*indicating* MR. VLADIMIR *with fan*]. He has been frightening me.

ASSIST. COM. [*deliberate scrutiny*]. You don't look frightened.

LADY GUEST. Well, at least he tried to.

ASSIST. COM. Force of habit, perhaps.

LADY MABEL. Sit down for a moment, Ethel, it isn't late yet.

LADY GUEST [*sits down*]. He has been threatening society with all sorts of horrors. It seems we all ought to quake in our shoes at the fate which waits for us if this terrorism is not suppressed. I had no idea this Greenwich Park affair was such a grave symptom.

ASSIST. COM. I have no doubt Mr. Vladimir has an exact notion of the gravity of this affair.

MR. VLAD. [*turns to* ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER. *Extreme urbanity*]. You mean, we have a great experience of these revolutionists? Yes, indeed, we have suffered greatly in my country from their activity, while you . . . [*witty smile*] . . . suffer their presence gladly, in your midst.

ASSIST. COM. [*moves away a little*]. Yes, I know we are being accused of too much lenity. And in this connection I should like to tell you. . . . [*Pauses, expectant.* MR. VLADIMIR *motionless, head over shoulder.* ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER *louder.*] We have got hold of a man called Verloc.

MR. VLAD. [*hurried movement to join* ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER]. Eh? What?

ASSIST. COM. [*casual*]. You know him, it seems.

MR. VLAD. [*taken aback*]. What makes you say that?

ASSIST. COM. [*as before*]. I don't. It's Verloc who says that.

MR. VLAD. [*affecting contempt*]. A lying dog of some sort.

ASSIST. COM. [*as before*]. What pleases me in this affair, is that it's such an excellent starting point for ridding this country of political spies, secret agents and all that sort of . . . dogs. We will be able to make ourselves unpleasant to their employers, too. The thing has become indecent as well as dangerous.

MR. VLAD. [*checking movement of retreat*]. What do you mean? How can you prove that?

ASSIST. COM. The prosecution of this Verloc will demonstrate to the public both the danger and the indecency.

MR. VLAD. [*unbelieving*]. Prosecution! Are you speaking seriously?

ASSIST. COM. Perfectly. We have got the man and we shall go on to the end.

MR. VLAD. [*protesting*]. Prosecution! [*Loquacious.*] You will only be feeding the lying spirit of these revolutionary scoundrels. What do you want to make a public scandal for? From morality or what? [*Agitated.*]

ASSIST. COM. We don't intend to let ourselves be bothered by shams under any pretext whatever.

MR. VLAD. [*furious*]. For my part, I can't admit your point of view. It's selfish. We ought to be good Europeans. I am a good European.

ASSIST. COM. [*perfect composure*]. Yes. Only you look at Europe from its other end. [*Good-natured.*] But you can't complain of our police now. This case

was specially difficult to deal with inasmuch as it was a sham. We have already established the identity of a man literally blown to shreds, have found the organizer of the attempt, and have obtained the certitude of the inciter behind him. I mention this business to you, because it is your Government that grumbles most at our police. You see that we are not so bad. I wanted particularly to tell *you* of our success.

MR. VLAD. [*not looking at* ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER. *Surly mutter*]. Much obliged, I am sure.

ASSIST. COM. [*pulls watch out. Smile*]. I have a hansom at the door. Can I put you down at the Club?

MR. VLAD. [*surly, dazed*]. I am not going to any damned . . . [*Violent.*] I will walk.

[*Remains thunderstruck. Stony stare.* ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER *moves towards couch to take leave.* LADY GUEST *looks at him over back of her chair.* LADY MABEL *extends her hand to him, with a smile.*]

CURTAIN

ACT IV

Scene I

CURTAIN rises on back parlour of Verloc's, *as in Act. I. Gas-jet lighted.* Winnie *finishes laying tea. Pauses at clatter of shop door bell. Expectant.* Mr. Verloc *enters from the shop, unbuttoned overcoat, hat on back of head, harassed aspect, drops on sofa, stares at his wife.*

Winnie [*attentive*]. Oh, here you are. I expected you at one o'clock.

Mr. Verloc [*drops eyes. Great effort*]. Couldn't . . . Business.

Winnie [*calm*]. I don't worry myself about the hours you keep. [*Goes to corner cupboard and opens it.*] What a wretched day it has been.

Mr. Verloc [*shuddering. Mutters*]. Like a nightmare.

Winnie [*turns round, a plate in hand*]. Have you been getting wet?

Mr. Verloc. Wet? I don't know. No. [*Shudders.*]

Winnie [*watchful*]. I shall have you laid up on my hands. Come to the fire.

Mr. Verloc [*bangs hat on couch, goes over*]. Laid up? No fear. I am tougher than you think. [*Menacing.*] And so they will all find. [*Sits down and hangs over grate.*]

WINNIE [*puts dish with beef on table*]. You ought to be hungry having been away all day. I have some cold meat for your tea.

MR. VERLOC [*huddling over the fire*]. I am not hungry. Couldn't eat anything.

WINNIE. You had better try presently. You should feed your cold.

MR. VERLOC [*shivering*]. I haven't got a cold.

WINNIE [*going on laying table. Unconcerned*]. Where have you been to-day?

MR. VERLOC. Nowhere . . . [*Mumbles.*] Lots of places. [*Louder.*] I have been to the bank.

WINNIE [*calm*]. To the bank. What did you want at the bank to-day?

MR. VERLOC [*reluctant*]. Draw some money out.

WINNIE. I didn't know you had to pay anything to-day.

MR. VERLOC [*mumbling*]. Well, I drew it out.

WINNIE [*slightly startled*]. What, all of it?

MR. VERLOC [*sits up*]. Yes, all of it.

WINNIE [*slowly*]. What did you do that for?

MR. VERLOC [*huddled up again*]. To have it handy. [*Snuffle.*] May need it. [*Shudder.*] There is no saying what may happen.

WINNIE [*standing still between table and cupboard*]. I don't know what you mean.

MR. VERLOC [*speaking into the grate*]. You know you can trust me.

WINNIE [*turns slowly to cupboard. Deliberate*]. Oh, yes, I can trust you. [*Turns away from cupboard, carving-knife and fork in her hand.*] If I hadn't trusted you I wouldn't have married you. [*Picks up kettle and makes tea.*] Adolf.

MR. VERLOC. What.

WINNIE. Come to your tea.

MR. VERLOC [*gets up, staggers a little, sits down heavily in chair at end of table. Gesture of disgust*]. I don't want anything.

WINNIE [*after waiting awhile*]. Aren't your feet wet? [MR. VERLOC *grunts.*] You aren't going out any more this evening, surely?

MR. VERLOC [*raises head*]. Going out? I have had enough of going out. I wish I had never gone out. [*Slight pause.*] No, it isn't of going out that I am thinking. What I want is to go away for good. Get out altogether—out of this—away to the devil—Australia—California. [*Morose.*] France would do.

WINNIE [*surprised but placid*]. You have been harping on that for more than a month past, Adolf. Emigrating. What would be the good of that?

MR. VERLOC. I am sick of this life. I have had enough of it—I have. . . .

WINNIE. You have a bad cold. You will feel different in a couple of days. You shouldn't make yourself a slave to all those foreign people. Nobody needs do that in this country. Why should you? This business isn't so bad. You have a comfortable home. [*Pause.*] And you are not tired of me. [*Takes his hand from behind and presses her lips to* MR. VERLOC'S *forehead.* MR. VERLOC *grips the edges of chair*

with both hands while the kiss lasts. Clatter of shop door bell. They start apart. MR. VERLOC *gets up heavily. Husky tone.*]

MR. VERLOC. You know how to hold me.

WINNIE [*urgent*]. Shop, Adolf. You go. [*Pause.*] You go, I have got my apron on. . . . Customer?

MR. VERLOC [*goes to door, peeps through curtain. Speaks from door. Agitated*]. Not a customer. [*Advancing towards his wife.*] I am afraid he will want me to go out again to-night.

WINNIE [*calm but forcible*]. Nonsense, you aren't well enough.

MR. VERLOC [*distracted*]. Must—if he asks me to. Business.

WINNIE. There you go again. A regular slave. Go and change your boots at least.

MR. VERLOC [*hesitating*]. Can't leave him out there. Wouldn't do, in the shop.

WINNIE [*gives him a slight push*]. All right. You go upstairs. I will see to that. [*As* MR. VERLOC *disappears upstairs* WINNIE *takes apron off, goes to door, peeps through before opening it. Very loud.*] Will you come in here, please, to wait. [*Pause.*] You understand English, don't you? [*Moves back.*]

ASSIST. COM. [*following her into the parlour and shutting the door behind him*]. Oh, yes, I understand English.

WINNIE. You've just come from the Continent, perhaps. [ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER *smiles.* WINNIE *sits down, hands on lap.*] You knew Mr. Verloc before, didn't you?

ASSIST. COM. [*observing her*]. We met already to-day. It was for the first time. I promised to call for him. We have a very important business matter to settle —without delay.

WINNIE [*with calm assurance*]. My husband will see you through whatever it is. He will be down in a moment.

ASSIST COM. [*Smiles. Then very grave*]. I hope to persuade him to do so.

WINNIE. You speak very good English.

ASSIST. COM [*after pause*]. I say, your husband hasn't gone out, perhaps.

WINNIE [*surprised*]. He couldn't. This is the only way out.

[*Heavy footsteps overhead. They wait in silence.*]

MR. VERLOC [*hair brushed down, overcoat buttoned*]. You keep your word.

ASSIST. COM. [*significant but friendly tone*]. You didn't think you were going to be dropped. I have settled the matter to your—advantage. But I think we had better not talk here. One of your friends might drop in.

MR. VERLOC. No, we can't talk here. [*Stands still.*]

ASSIST. COM. Well, let us go to the same place where we talked before. [*Slight bow to* WINNIE. *Moves off.* MR. VERLOC follows.]

WINNIE [*watches them, then suddenly*]. Adolf. Here!

MR. VERLOC [*to* ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER]. Just a minute, I will follow you.

[*Exit* ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER *through parlour door.*]

WINNIE [*crosses stage to sofa*]. Adolf, you weren't going out without your hat. [*Gives him hat.* MR. VERLOC *holds it in both hands as if he didn't know what to do with a hat.*] He isn't of that Embassy lot, is he?

MR. VERLOC. Embassy! No! Embassy lot! I would cut their hearts out one after another. But let them look out! I have got a tongue in my head.

WINNIE [*looking at him*]. You are not yourself, you are feverish. Well, get rid of the man, whoever he is, and come back to me. You want looking after. [*Pause.*] Do get it over.

MR. VERLOC [*starts. Rams hat on head. Mutters*]. Yes, that will be best.

WINNIE. I say, have you thought of leaving the money upstairs?

MR. VERLOC. Eh, what? [*Stupidly.*] I left nothing upstairs.

WINNIE [*extending open palm*]. Hadn't you better leave it with me? I don't like you to go out with all that in your pocket.

MR. VERLOC. Oh, the money I drew? I didn't know what you meant. [*Plunges hand in breast pocket and puts into wife's palm pocket-book.*] Yes, yes, of course. [*Hurries out through parlour door.*]

[WINNIE, *alone, peeps into pocket-book, looks all round room. Obvious hesitation. A movement towards staircase, a movement towards sideboard. Finally undoes two buttons of her bodice and slips pocket-book there. Picks up a bit of white needle-work from chair and turns gas down. Passes out slowly to shop.*]

Scene II

The shop door to street on right. Counter on left. Door to back parlour in middle wall. Dependent gas-jet in middle. Shop window next to street door. One chair behind counter, another on shop side of counter. Rest of space clear. Shelves behind counter sparsely occupied by cardboard boxes mostly, a few books and miscellaneous objects of glass. On counter two or three piles of newspapers, bottles of marking-ink, photographs, etc., etc.

Winnie *enters at once from parlour with the piece of white sewing in her hand. Sits down behind counter. Takes three or four stitches. While she is doing this a distant voice outside is heard, high-pitched.*

Greenwich Park Outrage. All the details!

[Winnie *sews on. Shrill voice nearer.*]

Bomb in Greenwich Park. [*Fainter.*] Latest edition. Bomb . . . [*Dies out.* Winnie *lets hands fall on lap and remains lost in thought. The street door opens with clatter of bell.* Heat *enters, closes door behind him, advances middle of shop. Swift glance round. Amiably. Businesslike.*]

Heat. Nasty weather. . . Good-evening, Mrs. Verloc.

Winnie [*on her feet behind the counter. Perfunctory attitude*]. Good-evening.

Heat [*conversational*]. It has been trying to rain all day. [*Advances to counter.*] Husband at home, Mrs. Verloc?

Winnie [*not looking at him*]. Mr. Verloc's out.

HEAT. Out? Is he? [*Markedly.*] I am sorry for that. [WINNIE *turns to shelves.* HEAT *a little louder.*] You are certain he is out?

WINNIE [*over her shoulder*]. Of course. [*Doubtful.*] I haven't seen you before, have I?

HEAT [*curt*]. I am sure I don't know. [*Good-humoured again.*] I remember seeing you. I have been at least three times here since your husband opened this shop; on a matter of private business. Strictly private. I bet he hasn't forgotten *me.* Well, here I am again and I am very disappointed to hear he is out. [*Slightly confidential.*] I am come again in my private capacity, you know, and you may just as well tell me the truth.

WINNIE. Well, he is out. [*Pushes a box into its place and turns about.*]

HEAT. I am in want of a little private information. I went home early, being, as it were, chucked out of a case. However, on thinking it over I felt I must look up your husband. I did expect to find him at home this evening. [*Pause.*] I would wait for him if I were sure he wouldn't be long.

WINNIE. He never tells me.

HEAT. It's quite a private call. You understand what I mean? Couldn't you give me some notion where he has gone to?

WINNIE [*shakes head*]. I can't say.

HEAT. Or what took him out?

WINNIE [*turning away again*]. I don't know.

HEAT [*louder*]. But I suppose you do know who I am? [WINNIE *glances over her shoulder.* HEAT *im-*

patient.] Come! You know well enough I am in the police.

WINNIE. I don't trouble my head much about these things. [*Faces* HEAT. *Hands hanging idle.*] What can I do for you?

HEAT. My name is Heat. Chief Inspector Heat of the Special Crimes Department. I want a little information.

WINNIE. Mr. Verloc went out about a quarter of an hour ago.

HEAT. And he didn't say when he would be back.

WINNIE [*casually*]. He didn't go out alone.

HEAT. Went out with a friend?

WINNIE [*touches back of her head*]. No. Stranger called. [*Pause.*] By appointment, I fancy.

HEAT. Indeed. What was his appearance? Would you mind giving me an idea?

WINNIE [*indifferent*]. He was a thin, tall man, with a long face. His moustaches were turned up. A foreigner I think. Spoke very good English.

HEAT [*stamps foot*]. Dash me if I didn't think he would! . . . Thank you, Mrs. Verloc. . . . I know who that is. [*Angry.*] I am damned if I ever heard of an old servant being treated in that way. [*Change of tone.*] I daresay you wonder, Mrs. Verloc, why I should take on so.

WINNIE. It has nothing to do with me.

HEAT [*with meaning*]. Hasn't it? [*Pause.*] I don't think I will wait for your husband. As likely as not those two will be coming back together. What do you think, Mrs. Verloc?

WINNIE. I don't trouble my head. [*Listless.*]

HEAT [*after a pause*]. You don't know anything?

WINNIE. No.

HEAT. You don't. [WINNIE *shakes head.*] You put it on very well, Mrs. Verloc, but all the same I fancy you could give me a pretty good notion of what's going on if you liked.

WINNIE. Going on? What *is* going on?

HEAT. Don't you ever look at a paper?

WINNIE. Not every day. Was there anything in the papers this morning?

HEAT. No. In the evening papers. Lots about an attempt to damage the Greenwich Observatory by means of a bomb. And you haven't heard yet? Why! There was a news-boy yelling at the end of your street, just as I came along. The Greenwich Park Outrage they call it. Revolutionists. Anarchs.

WINNIE. I call it silly—their talk and the newspapers, and all. We ain't down-trodden slaves here.

HEAT [*watchful stare*]. And your husband didn't mention anything of it to you when he came home? Nothing about the man blown to pieces?

WINNIE [*aloof*]. No. I would just as soon not know. [*Nonchalant.*]

HEAT [*provoked*]. I see. . . . [*Grim tone.*] There is another small matter I would have spoken to your husband about if he had been at home. But you will do. There came into our hands a—what we believe—may be a stolen overcoat.

WINNIE [*touches lightly her dress under which is the pocket-book. Calm*]. We have lost no overcoat.

HEAT. That's funny. [*Picking up small bottle off the counter.*] I see you keep marking-ink in stock. Purple, isn't it? That overcoat had a label sewn in under the collar with your address written in purple marking-ink.

WINNIE [*leans over counter*]. Oh! [*Louder.*] That's Stevie's. That's my brother's coat.

HEAT [*briskly*]. Is your brother about? Could I see him for a minute?

WINNIE. He isn't at home. . . . I sewed that leabel in his overcoat myself.

HEAT. But your brother's living with you, isn't he?

WINNIE. He's gone away for a few days, to stay with—with a friend in the country.

HEAT. The overcoat comes from the country. Who's that friend of yours? What's his name?

WINNIE [*reluctant*]. Mr. Michaelis.

HEAT [*low whistle*]. Exactly. And your brother now, what's he like—a thick-set dark chap?

WINNIE [*with fervour*]. Oh, no. That must be the thief. Stevie's slight and fair.

HEAT. Good. I should like to know a little more about him. He isn't deaf and dumb, is he?

WINNIE [*fearful, steady stare at* HEAT]. Who are you talking about?

HEAT. I am asking you about your brother.

WINNIE [*faltering voice*]. He is all right.

HEAT [*slightly excited*]. Why this label then? Suffer from fits?

WINNIE. You have got hold of somebody else, I tell you! Stevie's the nicest . . . [*Voice drops.*] He is a little forgetful at times.

HEAT. I see. Easily excitable, isn't he?

WINNIE [*effort to regain calm*]. Sometimes. A little with strangers. Do you know how the thief came by the coat? [*Louder.*] How did *you* come by it?

HEAT [*pulls out folded pink newspaper from pocket, throws it on counter, plunges hand in pocket again and brings out piece of overcoat, as in Act II.*] I suppose you recognize this?

WINNIE [*takes it in both hands, walks out to middle of shop, under gas, looks at the cloth and says*]. Yes. [*Steps back a pace and says slowly.*] Why is it torn out like this?

[*The position now is* HEAT *and* WINNIE *instead of facing each other across the counter on the left of the stage are in middle of shop.* HEAT *having turned round as* WINNIE *moved out from behind counter they again face each other under gas-jet, but this time* WINNIE *is on the right and* HEAT *on left*].

HEAT [*snatches cloth out of* WINNIE'S *hands saying*]. Identification perfect. [*Forcible tone.*] Mrs. Verloc, it strikes me that you may know more of this bomb affair than you yourself are aware of.

WINNIE [*staggers backwards. Staring eyes, still face, changed voice*]. Bomb affair? What has it to do with Stevie's overcoat?

[MR. VERLOC *enters street door in clatter of bell, shuts door behind him, stands with his back to it looking at* HEAT, *who looks at him. Then moves forward.*]

MR. VERLOC [*husky*]. You here! Who are you after?

HEAT [*curt*]. Nobody. [*Hurriedly.*] I must have a word or two with you.

MR. VERLOC [*without looking at* WINNIE. *Sulky*]. What about?

HEAT [*indignant*]. You ask what about! [*Low tone, touching lightly with his forefinger* MR. VERLOC'S *breast.*] *You* are the other man of the Park, Verloc! You understand me! The *other man.*

[*Short pause.* WINNIE *stands still, with mouth a little open.*]

MR. VERLOC. Come into the parlour then.

[*They move towards the parlour door and exit one after another.* HEAT *last. Door shut. Simultaneously* WINNIE *totters towards counter, seizes folded paper. Falls on chair, trembling from head to foot. Unfolding paper convulsively tears it in two and drops it on the floor. Glazed part of parlour door, which was dim before, lights up brightly, and a shadow arm or hat flits on it.* WINNIE *jumps up, runs to door, falls on her knees against it with ear to keyhole and profile to audience.*]

SCENE III

Parlour as before. During this scene HEAT *and* MR. VERLOC *are in a state of imperfectly suppressed excitement. For the most part they talk loudly only now and then dropping their voices. There is a certain similarity in their personal appearance, both big men, clothes same sort of cut, dark blue overcoats and round hats on. My intention is that both should remain at the back, as near as*

possible to the door leading into the shop. Also it must be remembered that in the action there is no interval. Therefore when the scene shifts HEAT *is still holding the handle of the door which he has just shut.* MR. VERLOC *is still very close to him when the dialogue begins.*

HEAT. By Heavens! You *are* the other man.

MR. VERLOC [*agitated, turns gas up full and speaks like a man beside himself*]. I bolted out of the park and didn't stop till I got to Maze Hill Station. A train came in. [*Gasps.*]

HEAT [*moves forward one pace from the door. With conviction*]. You must have been mad to go in for a thing like that

MR. VERLOC. I have been driven to it. I was mad, for more than a month. But it's all over now! Everything shall come out—and hang the consequences!

HEAT. Phew. Is that the game you are going to play?

MR. VERLOC. That's the game. Game for game. Driving a man crazy. That was his game.

HEAT. Whose game?

MR. VERLOC [*venomous*]. A pretty pink-faced gentleman. [*Hits table with fist.*] An Embassy swine.

HEAT [*warning*]. Don't make so much noise.

MR. VERLOC [*continuing, shaking fist*]. I will do for the lot of them. They will all get fired out.

HEAT [*calm*]. Really . . . I am perfectly aware who you have been out with just now. [*Wags forefinger.*] Well—don't trust too much to what you have

been promised by that gentleman. He's as cute as they make them.

MR. VERLOC [*fierce*]. He's all right. I must trust somebody.

HEAT [*as before*]. Remember that at this game you will give yourself away also. Before a month's out you may be knifed by one of your sweet anarch friends. That's what will happen to you.

MR. VERLOC [*gloomy*]. Jail's the safest place for me. That's where I want to be. Out of all this. I have been promised a light sentence—a year or so. [*Passionately.*] I wish you would take me away now. This minute. I would go with you like a lamb.

HEAT. I daresay. [*Jerks head towards shop door.*] Listen. You have always been straight with me. I have been circumvented and chucked out of this case. I am talking to you privately. Private citizen Heat. Clear out. Vanish.

MR. VERLOC. Vanish where? There would be no time to fix it up.

HEAT. Let me tell you, always privately, that all the blamed gang of your friends think you are no longer in this world.

MR. VERLOC. They do. [*Startled.*] Why?

HEAT [*contemptuous*]. Of course. Didn't you go for your silly bomb to the Professor? What else did you expect them to think? It was I that spotted the truth, about two hours after you ran out of the park.

MR. VERLOC [*jerks head up. Very loud*]. How on earth did you?

HEAT [*ironic*]. Miracle! What? [*Triumphant, loud, pulling piece of overcoat out of his pocket.*] What about this? Look at this label. Your wife. . . .

MR. VERLOC. Shh! Not so loud. [*Awed tone.*] Who would have thought she would have hit on a dodge like that? [*Looks down on the ground. Overcome.*]

HEAT. I saw that done only once before. A very old gentleman who liked to roam about the town alone. Good dodge that.

MR. VERLOC [*still looking down*]. It served *your* turn.

HEAT. I tell you I am out of this case. I would have roped in half a dozen of your fellows over this affair if I had been left alone. I don't mean you. I have known you too long. You meant no harm.

MR. VERLOC [*jerks head up*]. Look here! The boy was half an idiot. If he had been caught it would have been the asylum for him, nothing worse. I told him what to do twenty times over. Made him repeat it all that morning. Then I left him and went away to wait till he had done it. It was foggy early this morning. We could have both got clear. I was waiting for him.

HEAT [*interested*]. The bang startled you. Eh? Came too soon.

MR. VERLOC [*hoarse*]. Yes, it came too soon. I knew then that he was gone, and I ran down Chesterfield Walk. I don't think I met anyone till I was past the end of George Street.

HEAT [*marvelling*]. So easy as that! We think he stumbled against a tree root, you know. And you are right. He was gone pretty completely. The head they picked up and his feet too, but as for the rest. . . . [*Voice rising.*] They had to actually scrape

most of him together with the earth with a shovel, into waterproof sheet. Flesh, mud, bits of sticks and bones —I saw it. Pah!

MR. VERLOC. Not so loud.

HEAT [*lowers voice*]. The best thing for you is to be gone too, while your friends still think that you are dead. None of our people will try to stop you.

MR. VERLOC [*looking straight at* HEAT]. I am not a single man.

HEAT [*after a silence*]. I see! Well I will be off. [*Casual.*] I suppose you expect to be arrested to-morrow.

MR. VERLOC [*eyes again on the ground, head low*]. I suppose . . .

[HEAT *turns towards door when it opens and* WINNIE *appears.* HEAT *stands aside to let her pass, then exit, shutting the door behind him.* WINNIE *walks forward. Appearance of sleep-walker. Drops on sofa, upright, hands in lap for a moment. Street door bell clatters in shop.* WINNIE *hides face in hands. Not till then does* MR. VERLOC *make a movement which brings him to the front of the stage. He walks away R., then comes back L. to address* WINNIE.]

MR. VERLOC [*stopping in front of sofa*]. Winnie! Don't take on so. You had a shock—hadn't you? It's that damned Heat. Blurting it out like this to a woman. [*Heavily.*] Well, it can't be helped. Nothing can be helped now. [*Walks away R., comes back. Earnest. Husky.*] I made myself ill thinking how to break it to you. I sat for hours in the parlour of the Cheshire Cheese thinking out the best way. Do you

think I feel particularly gay just now? [WINNIE's *visible heave of chest.* MR. VERLOC *walks away again R., comes back, always stepping heavily and head low. Stops again.*] Listen, Winnie, we have got to think of to-morrow. You will need all your wits presently, for I may be taken away from you to-morrow. [*Bends towards* WINNIE *a little.*] Yes, put in prison for a year or two. For my own safety. Certainly. [*Sudden passion.*] I am going to give the whole show away. [*Spins round, walks away, returns. Change of tone.*] Do be brave, Winnie. What would it have been if you had lost me? [*Steps back, looks at* WINNIE.] And it might very well have happened any time this last month. I was getting desperate. It might have happened! [*Turns round once more and walks off.*]

WINNIE [*uncovers her face for a minute*]. You—took—the boy—away from—me—[*slight shriek*]—to murder him. [*Covers face again.*]

MR. VERLOC [*faces about*]. I! . . . I! . . . And it's *you* who say that? [*Quick step forward.*] You daren't say that and look me in the face. [*Seizes* WINNIE'S *wrist and tugs without success. Suddenly* WINNIE *jumps up, gives him a push.* MR. VERLOC *totters back, overturns chair behind him and* WINNIE *exit quickly up the stairs.* MR. VERLOC *instinctively picks up chair, moves to stairs. Shouts:*] Winnie! [*Waits a moment, returns to table, says:*] What's a fellow to do? [*Sits down, cuts a piece of meat off, takes a mouthful. Quick footsteps overhead.* MR. VERLOC *looks up. More quick footsteps. Lays down knife and fork, gets up.*] What's a fellow to do? [*Goes to foot of stairs.*] Winnie. [*Waits.*] You aren't going to bed? [*Waits.*] Well, don't come down again till you can hear reason. [*Waits. Shouts up the stairs:*] You must understand that a man

gets desperate sometimes. [*Waits. Shouts:*] You don't know what a brute I had to deal with. An ignorant, overbearing swine. [*Waits. Shouts:*] If I hadn't thought of you I would have taken the bullying scoundrel by the throat and rammed his head into the fireplace. [*Expectant. Again rapid sound of footsteps above. Discouraged. Mutters.*] She must get over it the best she can. [*While he walks heavily L. towards the sofa,* WINNIE *appears at foot of stairs R. Same dress but hat on and a close veil. Umbrella in hand, old gloves on. Stands still.* MR. VERLOC *turns at L. and perceives her. Astounded.*] What? You've got your hat on? You don't think I will let you go out to-night? I suppose it's your mother you want to run to. Well, it's too late. That sort of news can wait till next day. And what about leaving me in my trouble? I couldn't stand being alone in the house. [*Gloomy.*] I need company. [*Stands with hanging head.*] Your company. I can't do without you this evening.

WINNIE [*in the stair doorway. Very white. Monotonous, impersonal voice*]. And I thought he had caught a cold. [*Steps out into the room.*]

MR. VERLOC [*starts*]. What did you say? Where are you going? [*Disregarded. Shouts:*] Sit down! [WINNIE *sits down on chair near fireplace.* MR. VERLOC *remains on farther side of table from* WINNIE.]

[*It is to be observed that during the whole scene* MR. VERLOC *speaks like a man completely absorbed in himself and his own view of the situation.* WINNIE *must be characterized by a visible rigidity of body. Her voice when coming through the veil is blank in expression. When veil is down her face is white, her eyes by contrast very black. General expression set and unchangeable.*]

MR. VERLOC [*beginning again suddenly*]. You didn't think I would let you go out to-night?

WINNIE [*behind the veil. Impersonal*]. He will never let me go.

MR. VERLOC [*sudden change of tone*]. I had to do with a venomous beast. Some of the highest of the land have to thank me for walking on their two legs to-day. That's the kind of man you've got married to, my girl. Drive me into a ditch to starve! A man like me! I have been playing my head at that game any day these ten years. You didn't know, and quite right too. I am not a chap to worry a woman that's fond of me. You had no business to know. The scoundrel! I would have bashed his face in as he sat here if I had not loved you.

WINNIE [*voice of dead fear behind the veil*]. What is he talking about?

MR. VERLOC [*much aggrieved*]. What do you take me for? A murderer, or what? I hunted this town high and low. I ran the risk of giving myself away to find somebody for that accursed job. I couldn't find anyone hungry enough or crazy enough. Do you think I wanted the boy to blow himself up?

WINNIE [*wail behind her veil*]. O-o-o-oh. [*Sits perfectly motionless.*]

MR. VERLOC [*frightened*]. Don't. [*Earnest.*] It's as much an accident as if he had been run over by a bus while crossing the street.

WINNIE [*voice behind veil, vibrating*]. He walked down the street with him. [*Gasp.*] I watched them. [*Break of voice.*] Might have been father and son.

MR. VERLOC [*who had been steadying himself with one hand on the edge of the table, leans forward with both hands on it. Forcible*]. Your carrying on in this way won't bring him back again. [WINNIE *jumps up and sits down again.*] He's dead. His troubles are over. Ours are just going to begin, I tell you. Precisely because of that . . . [*hesitates*] . . . that accident.

WINNIE [*behind the veil, despairing tone*]. Might have been father and son.

MR. VERLOC [*dispassionately*]. I was fond too of the boy. Enough of this. I have told you now the truth of it all. What more do you want?

WINNIE [*impersonal tone*]. I want to die.

MR. VERLOC [*movement of impatience*]. No, you don't. You have got me. [*Begins to move ponderously towards* WINNIE *across front of stage.*] There's lots of things we must talk over; and to begin with take this damned thing off your face. [*Stops.*] Take it off, I say. [WINNIE *perfectly still.* MR. VERLOC *advances one step more.*] One can't tell who one is talking to. I am not tired of your face. What's this nonsense? [*Pulls veil off.*]

[*It is to be observed that at that precise moment* MR. VERLOC *presents his back to the audience and masks his wife from it. There is no brutality expressed in the swift action. When* MR. VERLOC *steps aside he discloses* WINNIE *in the same rigid pose, white face, black eyes, veil hanging down like a rag against right cheek.* MR. VERLOC *then on extreme R. of stage leans against the end of mantelpiece.*]

[*Speaks quietly.*] That's better. [*Looks away from* WINNIE. *Ponderous and feeling.*] What you want

is a good cry. [*Sigh.*] But just now there is no time for tears. We must talk over our future. There may be years before us yet. [WINNIE *opens her lips as if to scream and shuts them again without any other movement.* MR. VERLOC *pursues, looking downwards, semi-confidential, semi-forcible, husky voice.*] For a time you will have to manage to live alone. In a year or so they will let me out quietly and then we will clear out, somewhere, anywhere. You will stand by me. [*Deep conviction but no sentimentality.*] I did try to be a good husband to you.

[WINNIE *gets up with restrained movements, extends her right arm towards her husband, but* MR. VERLOC *has already moved away towards L. of stage and* WINNIE *turning slowly leans her back against mantelpiece without a word. Begins to pull off her right glove.*]

MR. VERLOC [*from L. approving*]. That's right, but why won't you say something? [*Pause.*] You have a devilish way of holding your tongue sometimes. Some men would get mad with a woman for it. But I am fond of you. How could I let you go out in that state galloping off to your mother with some crazy tale or other about me? [*Change of tone. More animation.*] And when it comes to that it's as much your doing as mine. Strike me dead if I ever would have thought of the lad if you had not kept on shoving him on to me. One would think you were doing it on purpose to make me fond of him. Hang me if I wasn't beginning to be. Devil only knows what you had in your head. There's no saying how much you know of what's going on with your don't-care-a-damn way of looking on and saying nothing at all. [*Sudden passion. Takes hat off and throws it in corner of room Excitement subsides. Weary*

tone.] Lord, I am tired. Ever since six o'clock this morning on the go. And from one shock to another and thinking of you sitting at home. [*Blows air from cheeks.*] And then you meet me with that deaf-and-dumb trick of yours as if you hadn't loved me for seven years. [*Drops on sofa. Leans back. Another change of tone.*] I suppose I might have cleared out straight away. They think I have blown myself to pieces.

WINNIE [*face motionless but voice near a scream*]. All in the mud. [*Puts backs of hands to her eyes for a moment and lets them fall again. No other change or movement.*]

MR. VERLOC [*awed for a moment*]. Damn that Heat. [*Louder.*] I tell you that if I hadn't been so sure of you being fond of me I could never have faced the music. [*Ponderous.*] If I had caught sight of that Embassy swine as I was dragging myself home to you I would have knifed him in the street.

WINNIE [*sudden movement; then motionless. Blank voice*]. Knifed! . . . Yes.

MR. VERLOC [*half reclines on sofa. Easier tone*]. We must make up our minds to get over it. And quickly too, old girl. Life won't wait.

WINNIE [*as before*]. Life . . . Yes.

MR. VERLOC [*puts feet up on sofa*]. I wish to goodness I had never seen or heard of Greenwich Park. You believe me—don't you?

WINNIE [*as before*]. Park. . . . Yes.

MR. VERLOC [*wriggles comfortable position. Hand under cheek*]. At least you needn't worry about me. I have made it so that the very police are on my side.

Nothing can touch me at present. [*Pause.*] Come here—will you?

WINNIE [*slight movement forward*]. Yes. [*Begins to walk, then stops close against the table.*]

MR. VERLOC [*movement to make room on the sofa. Waits a moment. Imperative*]. Come here.

WINNIE [*moves forward*]. I am coming. [*As she passes on towards couch her hand grasps the carving knife. Face slightly distorted.*]

SCENE IV

The shop, exactly as before, with newspaper torn on the floor, gas burning. Glass door to parlour is brightly lit. A shadow falls on the glass. Door comes open. WINNIE *stumbles in looking over her shoulder. Flings door to with a crash, makes as if to run across the shop but falters and drops into chair on shop side of counter, powerless. Her face is very white and set. The veil still hangs down against her right cheek. She closes her eyes the time to count three, then opens them very wide straight at the audience. Stare of terror. Jumps up with a feverish mutter.* No! That must never be! No! That must never be! *Steals to the street door. At moment of opening it listens and apparently frightened at something she has heard lets go door handle, steal back across the shop to L. as far as the counter. Hangs on to it looking back over her shoulder. Takes fresh start, repeating:* To the bridge, and over I go! To the bridge, and over. . . . *Is near the door when it opens unexpectedly, with a clatter of the bell.* WINNIE *leaps aside.*

OSSIPON [*opens door just enough to slip through. Advances to middle of shop before looking behind him. Perceives* WINNIE *with her hands to her ears. Immensely surprised*]. Hullo, Mrs. Verloc. . . .

WINNIE [*gasping cry*]. No. No. That must never be.

OSSIPON. Why, Mrs. Verloc! Don't you know me?

WINNIE [*cry of relief*]. Mr. Ossipon! [*Crazy laugh.*] I was going to run out. [*Totters.*]

OSSIPON [*attentive*]. Hadn't you better sit down? [*Assists* WINNIE *to chair.*]

WINNIE [*looking up at him*]. I was going to run out. [*Loud, distracted.*] To the bridge and over. . . . [*Voice dies out.*]

OSSIPON [*puzzled*]. Over the bridge? On your way to your mother's? You didn't mean to walk that distance.

WINNIE. I would run to the end of the world.

OSSIPON [*sincere*]. What on earth for? [*Catching himself up.*] You are unstrung by your terrible loss, I see. But can one run away from sorrow? [*Tender accents.*] I too couldn't rest till I had seen you! An irresistible sympathy. . . . [*Deep feeling.*] Can't you guess what brought me here, dear—Mrs. Verloc.

WINNIE [*nervous*]. No. What brought you here?

OSSIPON [*slightly checked*]. Why, just what I've said. The thought of your cruel loss. The suddenness. . . .

WINNIE [*breaks in*]. Loss! You thought of me! You know already! You! How did you know?

OSSIPON [*a little impatient*]. Calm yourself. I saw the evening paper and then the Professor, you know him,

a miserable little bit of a man told me he had supplied lately our poor friend. It was easy to guess then. And at once I felt I must come to you. [*Tender.*] I always think of you. [*Takes her hand. Hand passive. Drops it.*] My dear Mrs. . . . [*Brusque.*] I don't see why I should call you Mrs. Verloc . . . your husband is gone and my love for you made me hate the name, my dear. . . .

WINNIE [*intense*]. I have hated it for years.

OSSIPON [*checked. Recovers*]. My dear, dear Winnie!

WINNIE [*repressed cry*]. Then you will save me?

OSSIPON [*surprised. Hesitates*]. Certainly.

WINNIE. Other people have friends. Even murderers have relations, friends, somewhere to go. [*Broken voice.*] But I have nothing—[*desolation*]—and no one.

OSSIPON [*softly*]. You have me. I am here! If I were a boy I would say I am at your feet. But I am a man and I will stand by your side. [*Doubtful look at* WINNIE *who doesn't seem to hear him at all.*] For life. [*Waits for some sort of response, steps back a pace.*] I daresay you have seen how serious my love was. [*Sigh.*] But you were always so distant.

WINNIE [*sudden burst out*]. What else did you expect me to be? Distant? [*Drop of voice.*] I was a respectable woman. . . . Till he made me what I am.

OSSIPON [*slightly puzzled*]. Anybody could see that you were worthy of a better fate.

WINNIE. Better fate! I have been cheated out of seven years of life.

OSSIPON [*concealing surprise*]. You seemed to live so happily together. It's that which made me timid with you. You seemed to love him.

WINNIE [*cry*]. Love him! [*Voice drops.*] I have been a good wife. [*Sombre.*] You thought I loved? You did? [*Explosive.*] Look here, Tom. . . .

OSSIPON [*makes movement forward as if to embrace* WINNIE *but something in her aspect checks him. Tenderly*]. Dearest Winnie.

WINNIE [*still face. Begins to speak*]. A young girl with two people depending on her. What could I do? Could I've gone on the streets? Two helpless people, Mother and the boy. [*Voice rises.*] My Stevie. [*Voice drops.*] He was much more mine than Mother's. Nights and nights I sat up with him on my lap, all alone upstairs when I wasn't more than twelve years old myself. [*Passionately.*] He was mine, I tell you. You can't understand that. [*Lower.*] No man can understand that. [*Louder.*] What was I to do? [*Hides her face in her hands a moment, then drops them in her lap. Narrates.*] There was a young fellow. He was the man I loved. Five and twenty shillings a week! And his father threatened to kick him out of the business if he was fool enough to marry a girl with a crippled mother and an idiot brother on her hands. He would hang about me till one evening I found the courage to slam the door in his face. I had to do it. I loved him dearly. Five and twenty shillings a week! There was that other man, a good lodger. He seemed good-natured. He was free with his money. He wanted me anyhow. What is a girl to do? [*Renewed agitation.*] Seven years! A good wife to him. The kind, the good, the generous. . . . [*Choking sound.*] And he loved me! Oh yes, he loved me—till I sometimes

wished myself. . . . [*Voice rising.*] Seven years. Seven years a wife to him. [*Jumps up, seizes* OSSIPON'S *arms below shoulders. Vehement.*] And do you know what he was—that dear friend of yours? Do you know what he was? [*Sinister drop in voice.*] He was a devil!

OSSIPON [*stupidly*]. No, I didn't know. [*Recovers himself. False sentiment.*] Unhappy woman. [*Second thought.*] Unhappy, brave woman. [*More cheerful.*] Ah! But you are free now.

WINNIE [*who had let him go seizes his forearm again. Wildly*]. A free woman? And you, you—you guessed what I had to do. [*Shrill.*] Had to! [*Hangs on* OSSIPON'S *arm.*]

OSSIPON [*at a loss. Conversational*]. How did you first come to hear of that silly . . . I mean that horrible explosion in Greenwich Park.

WINNIE [*droops, listless*]. From the police. A man came—Chief Inspector Heat he said he was. He showed me. . . . [*Falters.*] Blown to little bits. [*Shudders.*]

OSSIPON [*finds his tongue*]. The police? You mean to say the police have been here already! Chief Inspector Heat! [*Stares.*]

WINNIE [*listless as before*]. Yes, he came. He didn't care. He showed me a piece of overcoat. "Do you know this?" he says—just like that.

OSSIPON [*unbelieving*]. Heat! Heat himself! . . . And what did he do?

WINNIE [*drooping*]. Nothing. He did nothing. He went away. [*Hopeless.*] The police were on that man's side. Another fellow came too.

OSSIPON [*more scared*]. Another! Another inspector, do you mean?

WINNIE. I don't know. He looked like a foreigner. Perhaps one of them Embassy people.

OSSIPON [*profoundly amazed*]. Embassy? Are you aware what you are saying? What on earth do you mean by Embassy?

WINNIE. It's some place in Chesham Square. What does it matter?

OSSIPON. And that fellow, what did he want?

WINNIE [*utterly weary*]. I don't remember. . . . Nothing . . . I don't care. Don't ask me.

OSSIPON [*after a moment's thought, very resolute*]. All right. I won't. This is a bit too deep for me. And —it *is* all over. I suppose you have laid something by in all this time. [*Pause. Glib.*] Savings, I mean. It is of your future that I am thinking, Winnie dear. Anarchists of my sort are not a rich lot.

WINNIE [*who has not heard*]. Tom! You must take me away from here.

OSSIPON [*startled*]. Take you away? Do you mean to-night?

WINNIE. At once! I have got only you.

OSSIPON [*impressed*]. Take you away! Where?

WINNIE. Away from this horror—from that room. On to the Continent. Anywhere.

OSSIPON. On the Continent. . . . [*Slowly.*] Not a bad idea.

WINNIE [*urgent*]. To-night, this minute. Do you know what was in my mind just before you came? I

was saying to myself—To the bridge and over I go! Unless you let me come with you at once I am lost!

OSSIPON. You want to come with me! [*Diplomatic.*] The trouble is, my dear, that I share my room with a friend. I couldn't possibly take you there. One could try for a lodging somewhere. But the truth is, my dear, that I have only sevenpence on me. [*Philosophical.*] That's so, my darling Winnie. I have no money.

WINNIE [*start. Clutch at dress. Cry*]. But I have. [*Rapidly.*] I have the money. I have enough money. Tom! Let us go away from here. [*Drags at him.*] Save me!

OSSIPON [*resists. Cautiously*]. How much money have you got?

WINNIE [*vehement*]. I have the money, I tell you. All the money.

OSSIPON [*incredulous*]. What do you mean? All that Verloc had in the bank, or what?

WINNIE [*distracted*]. Yes. Yes. I have got it all. Save me.

OSSIPON. Got it already? How on earth . . . !

WINNIE [*subdued. Trembling. Whispers*]. He gave it to me himself.

OSSIPON [*slowly*]. Well—then—we'll be all right.

WINNIE. You will save me, Tom? [*Sinks on* OSSIPON'S *breast.* OSSIPON *gives her a kiss. They come apart.* WINNIE *seizes lapels of* OSSIPON'S *coat.*] Save me! Don't let them get hold of me. Rather kill me first. I am afraid of it.

OSSIPON [*uneasy. Voice surly*]. What the devil are you afraid of?

WINNIE. Can't you guess? And yet you felt at once what I had to do with him. Had to do. . . . [*Voice drops. Sombre tone.*] I won't have it. I won't. You must kill me first. [*Shakes lapels of his coat.*] It must never be.

OSSIPON [*perplexed. Grumpy*]. You don't want any promises from me. I have loved you for years. I will do anything you like.

WINNIE [*distracted*]. Look, Tom. Look! I forgot. Look.

OSSIPON. Look at what?

WINNIE. The light . . . the light there! Go and put it out or I will go screaming mad! I daren't. Put it out before we go from here.

OSSIPON. Why! Of course! We must put out the lights and lock the shop door. [*Moves off to parlour door carelessly.*] Before we go.

WINNIE [*motionless*]. For ever.

OSSIPON [*stops. Sudden thought*]. What have you done with that money?

WINNIE. I have it on me. Quick, Tom! Quick! [*Gives* OSSIPON *slight push.*]

OSSIPON [*still looking at her, extends arm, opens door. Turns head. Instant of immobility. Faint yell*]. Verloc! [*Leaps back.*]

WINNIE [*seizes hold of him and pushes him against the counter*]. What have you seen? Isn't he dead?

OSSIPON [*nearly collapsed. Painful gasps*]. On the sofa! He's shamming sleep on the sofa. [*Distracted, sudden energy.*] What are you two up to? You have

trapped me—with your money. Let me go. [*Struggles.*] Police! Embassies! Let me. . . !

WINNIE [*holding him against counter*]. He is dead. Haven't I killed him?

OSSIPON [*nearly overcome*]. You! You. [*Exhausted.*] He was not blown up then! . . . not blown . . . [*Faintness.*]

WINNIE. Didn't he look dead enough to you lying there? Didn't he?

OSSIPON [*recovering*]. He . . . he looked . . . comfortable. [*Gives way to horrible fascination, tiptoes to door. Peeps. Immobility.*]

WINNIE [*harsh voice*]. Look down at the floor.

OSSIPON [*withdraws his head suddenly and shuts the door.*] Ough! [*Retches.*] Most horrible mess. [*Spits.*]

WINNIE [*whisper*]. Yes! I ran away from it when it began to trickle. [*Cry.*] Don't let them hang me, Tom! That must never be!

OSSIPON [*scared glance, moment of thought. Business-like*]. And you have done this thing quite by yourself?

WINNIE. Yes. [*Piteous.*] Take me away. I'll work for you. I have no one in the world. Who will look at me if you don't?

OSSIPON [*awed tone*]. Then you took the money away from him?

WINNIE [*vacant. Fixed stare of terror. Points at her breast*]. Money? It's here. I'll love you.

OSSIPON [*hollow voice*]. Was he asleep?

WINNIE. He! Asleep! [*Rapid utterance.*] He had been talking, talking, talking—after taking the boy

away under my very eyes to kill him—the loving, harmless, innocent boy. My own boy, I tell you. He lay on the couch easy—after killing the boy—my boy. And he says to me "Come here," after telling me I had helped to kill the boy. Do you hear me, Tom? He says like this: "Come here." [*Vehement.*] After taking my very heart out of me along with the boy to smash in the dirt. [*Desolate pause. Hands drop.*] Blood and dirt . . . blood and dirt.

OSSIPON [*sudden comprehension*]. Your brother! The degenerate? Heavens! [*Astonishment.*] Everybody's been fooled all round.

WINNIE [*beginning again*]. Come here! . . . I saw the knife on the table and I thought I would come if he wanted me so much. Oh yes! I did come—for the last time . . . [*forcible*] . . . with the knife.

OSSIPON [*mutters*]. This is awful. [*Wipes perspiration from forehead.*] Continent. Continent. . . . Now I understand.

WINNIE [*shrill*]. Help, Tom. Save me. I won't be hanged. That must never be.

OSSIPON [*catches hold of her round the waist, puts hand on her mouth*]. Don't make that noise. A policeman may be passing.

WINNIE [*slides out of his arms on to her knees and embraces* OSSIPON'S *legs*]. Tom, you can't throw me off. I'll slave for you. [*Shamefaced tone.*] I'll never ask you to marry me.

OSSIPON [*nervous*]. Get up. [*Helps her up with the air of a man who has made up his mind.*] Save you. Certainly. Are you calm enough now to understand what I say?

WINNIE [*eager. Breathless*]. Oh, Tom, every word!

OSSIPON [*glances at* WINNIE]. You haven' got that knife about you?

WINNIE [*low exclamation*]. Haven't you seen it? I ran from him, I tell you.

OSSIPON [*nervous*]. Devil only knows how you have done it. Pull yourself together. My love will save you. We will slip out presently to catch a train. Are you listening? Railway station . . . hm . . . yes. You will have to walk straight into the ladies' waiting-room. See? [WINNIE *nods and seizes his forearm.*] I'll walk behind you. Don't be afraid. Then I will leave you for a moment to get our tickets for . . . for the Continent. Do you follow me? [*Effort.*] My dear Mrs. . . . [*Effort.*] My darling Winnie. [WINNIE, *gazing at him, nods slightly.*] Tickets of course cost money, my poor darling. [*Pause.*] Well?

WINNIE. Yes, yes. Oh, Tom, when I struck him I felt as free as air. A free woman. [*Shudder.*] Ready to be hanged. [*Low and vehement.*] I *won't* be hanged.

OSSIPON [*forced calm*]. If I only had enough money for the tickets I would answer for that. [*Exasperated.*] I suppose you mean to hand that money to me. I want it for the tickets.

WINNIE [*feverish eagerness. Tearing at dress till buttons fall off*]. Yes, money. Yes, here!

OSSIPON [*takes pocket-book. Peeps in, hands trembling*]. Be calm . . . you are safe. [*Puts money in his pocket. Remains at a loss.* WINNIE *seizes his forearm again.*]

WINNIE. The light . . . the light. You must put it out. Go in, Tom.

OSSIPON [*moves towards parlour door. Stops*]. I am damned if I do. There is that horrible mess on the floor there. Might step into it. That would be a pretty thing. [*Reflects.*] Where's your meter?

WINNIE. Behind the counter. Hurry up, Tom, or I will go mad.

[OSSIPON *moves behind the counter. Dives out of sight and suddenly both lights in parlour and shop go out. Directly this happens it is seen that a street lamp throws a dim sheen through the various objects in the window into the shop.*]

WINNIE [*deep sigh*]. At last. [OSSIPON *emerges and with stealthy steps and turned head watching all the time the motionless* WINNIE *makes his way towards the door of the shop, puts hand on handle but instead turns the key very startled. Loud whisper.*] Policeman!

WINNIE [*cry of terror*]. Save me, Tom.

OSSIPON [*terrified too*]. Shh . . . keep quiet. [*Rushes at* WINNIE. WINNIE *seizes him round the body.* OSSIPON *holds* WINNIE *by the neck with one arm and puts the other over her face. They sway a little, perfectly silent while the door of the shop is being tried, then bullseye light flashes through front window. Measured footsteps go away.* OSSIPON *releases* WINNIE.]

WINNIE [*remains clinging to him*]. My legs are giving way, Tom. Hold me up. I am done.

OSSIPON. Damned scare! [*Looks round shop like a cornered man.*] Sit a moment in this chair. [*Helping her towards chair.*] How am I to save you if you give way like this?

[*Settles* WINNIE *in chair on shop side of counter, facing left.* OSSIPON *bends over back of chair to give* WINNIE *a kiss on the cheek.*]

WINNIE [*without looking at him*]. You will get me off, Tom. [*Has taken no notice of the kiss.*]

OSSIPON [*behind her, between chair and street door*]. Certainly . . . [*Exhausted.*] Have you a drop of brandy anywhere? [*Looks at parlour door. Horrified.*] No, never mind. [*Takes handkerchief, wipes his brow.*]

WINNIE [*grieved voice*]. Oh, Tom, how is it that I am afraid to die now when my poor Stevie has been taken away from me so cruelly? Oh! . . .

OSSIPON [*short step backwards. Extends arm behind* WINNIE'S *back*]. Now, don't shriek . . . be calm if you want to be saved. Sit still. We must give that confounded bobby time to get clear. I don't suppose the place is particularly watched.

WINNIE [*monotonous, broken voice*]. Tom. I tried. And I couldn't. Am I hard? Isn't it enough horror for such as me? Oh, Stevie, Stevie!

OSSIPON [*takes a step backwards*]. Uncommon lad that brother of yours. Sit still, you must rest before we go. Most interesting young fellow. A perfect type in a way. I observed him closely. Perfect.

WINNIE [*more feeling in voice*]. He was that indeed. He was everything. You took a lot of notice of him, Tom, I know, and I couldn't help loving you for it. [*Makes a slight movement.*]

OSSIPON. Loving me . . . Then trust me. Collect your strength. No train for a good while yet.

[*Another step backwards.*] You resembled each other wonderfully—you and your poor brother.

WINNIE [*dry sob*]. Did we? He was to me like my heart, in my body. . . And I can't find a tear for him. Not a tear. Not one!

OSSIPON [*feeling behind him for the key of door*]. Tears, indeed. Let yourself go. Your feelings, I mean.

WINNIE [*emotion creeping into tone*]. Stevie, my own darling, my own life. All my feelings are gone away from me, with you. . . .

OSSIPON [*watchful, has found the key. Softly*]. Yes . . . [*Turns key but* WINNIE *makes a movement and* OSSIPON'S *hand comes back. He even takes a step forward.*]

WINNIE [*falling cadence*]. Taken away from me . . . to be murdered. [*Flings arms on counter, drops head on arms. Heartrending tone.*] Smashed in blood and dirt. [OSSIPON, *sudden and swift, flings door open, leaps out into street, leaving door nearly wide.* WINNIE *still head on arms, continuing:*] But I am too hard to cry! Oh, Tom, I will live all the days of my life for you. [*Gust of wind inside.* WINNIE *raises head.*] Tom! Tom! [*Jumps up. Wild.*] Tom! [*Amazed.*] Tom, you must save me! [*Runs to open door to the very threshold. A distant shout and the blowing of a whistle heard. Shriek.*] I won't be hanged. [*Runs back and leans with shoulder against wall R., panting, back to audience. Whole attitude must be expressive of still terror. For a moment the open doorway empty, then* INSPECTOR HEAT *and* CONSTABLE *with bullseye appear together.*]

HEAT [*walks right into middle of shop*]. Anybody here? [*Peers.*] Ah! Is it you, Mrs. Verloc? [CONSTABLE

flashes bullseye on WINNIE.] *We must have a light here.* [*Gets box out of pocket, strikes match.*] Why it's turned on. [*Drops match.*]

CONSTABLE. Must be off at the meter, sir. [*Goes behind counter. Stoops.*] Try now, sir.

HEAT [*ready with another match. Gas lighted. Moving towards* WINNIE, *who holds her head down. Speaks to* CONSTABLE]. Better have a look in the back shop. Gas might have been left on there too.

CONSTABLE. Yes, sir. [*Steps into parlour.*]

HEAT [*to* WINNIE]. Mrs. Verloc, what's the matter with you? [*Attentive.*] Where's your husband? [*Lifts* WINNIE'S *chin with finger and looks at her face.*] Ah! that's bad.

CONSTABLE [*speaking from the parlour*]. A man apparently drunk and asleep in here, sir. [*Parlour lights up. Startled tone.*] The man's dead, sir.

WINNIE [*whispering voice*]. I won't be hanged. I *won't! That* must never be.

HEAT [*holding up* WINNIE *in his arms. Very loud*]. All right. I know what that is. Just come back here. [CONSTABLE *reappears.*] Shut that street door. [HEAT *lowers slowly* WINNIE *to the floor, where she crouches, profile to audience.* HEAT *moves away, picks up piece of torn newspaper from floor and tosses it to the* CONSTABLE *who has shut the door.*] Here! Stuff that infernal bell with this.

WINNIE [*loud, pointing with finger. Crouching attitude*]. Look there. The light. . . . The door . . . it's open. . . . The door . . . the light. [*Low voice.*] I shall go mad.

HEAT [*goes to shut the parlour door, returns middle of stage, saying*]. What the devil's up out there?

OSSIPON [*screaming in the street*]. Not from here. I haven't been in this place to-night. [CONSTABLE *opens door.* OSSIPON *led in between* DETECTIVE *and* 2ND CONSTABLE.]

DETECTIVE. I was passing by the corner when I heard a woman screaming and saw a man running out of this street. We soon got hold of him. I know who he is.

HEAT [*mutters*]. I should think you would.

DETECTIVE. I was sure he would have come out of this shop.

OSSIPON [*no cap, dishevelled, muddy, torn collar. Scream*]. I haven't been near this place for a month. I haven't been near . . . [*Falters.*]

DETECTIVE. That's so. None of our men noticed him about here lately.

OSSIPON. I know nothing. I have done nothing . . . I was running for dear life. She's deadly.

HEAT [*very softly*]. Mrs. Verloc, look this way. Have you seen this man to-night?

WINNIE. Light . . . light . . . I shall go mad. Put it out. Save me. [*Hides her eyes with the backs of her hands.*]

DETECTIVE [*tone of wonder*]. He's behaving like a lunatic. Yet he recognized me at once . . . What's the matter with you?

OSSIPON [*wildly*]. I just managed to get away from that devil. [*Groan.*] Give me a drink.

HEAT [*curt*]. Found anything on him?

DETECTIVE. Yes. A brand-new pocket-book with quite a number of notes in it.

OSSIPON [*shriek*]. Propaganda funds. Inspector Heat, you know who I am.

DETECTIVE. He edits a little paper—that's a fact.

HEAT [*grim*]. Yes. But there is a murdered man lying here, so in view of that fact you had better take him away.

OSSIPON. I didn't know! I didn't do it! She did it! She's a degenerate! I was terrified. I was running away from her.

[*While he is shouting* DETECTIVE *and* 2ND CONSTABLE *are dragging him to the street door.* 1ST CONSTABLE *opens it.*]

DETECTIVE. Why don't you behave yourself? It isn't as if you didn't know me.

OSSIPON [*exhausted voice*]. A murdering degenerate. I was terrified.

[*Exit* OSSIPON, DETECTIVE *and* 2ND CONSTABLE. 1ST CONSTABLE *shuts the door.*]

HEAT [*vexed tone*]. If this goes on we'll have a crowd in the street presently.

WINNIE [*loud blank voice*]. Blood and dirt.

HEAT [*bending over* WINNIE *takes her hands away from eyes*]. Mrs. Verloc, you know me. I am Inspector Heat.

WINNIE [*loud whisper*]. I won't be hanged. Save me. Save me.

HEAT. I would, with all my heart. [*Stands up. Turning head to* CONSTABLE.] No law can hurt her now.

CONSTABLE. I suppose not, sir. [*Door handle rattles.* CONSTABLE *steps back. Door opens masterfully. Enter* PROFESSOR.]

PROFESSOR [*walks right on to the stage*]. Well, I confess I didn't expect to see you here, Inspector Heat. [*Looks round.*] But we have met before, and we shall no doubt meet many times yet. Do I intrude?

HEAT. You are the very man that ought to be here to-night. You certainly had a finger in this pie. Aren't you proud of it?

PROFESSOR [*shrugs shoulders*]. I, proud! I know no pride—no shame—no God—no master. . . . Isn't that Verloc's wife? [*Points at* WINNIE.]

HEAT [*grim*]. No. That's a mad woman.

PROFESSOR [*leans back against the counter*]. I expected to see the whole lazy gang here. [*Composed.*] What have you done with Verloc's remains?

HEAT. You may see Verloc if you like, in the back parlour. He has got a carving knife stuck into his side up to the handle. If you had stuck it there yourself you could be no more guilty of that death.

PROFESSOR [*movement of genuine surprise*]. Verloc! Here! Hasn't he blown himself up? . . . . Oh, don't explain. I am not interested. Somebody's killed him—and what is that to me?

WINNIE [*from the floor. Loud*]. The drop given was fourteen feet. The drop . . . No! That must never be.

HEAT [*to* PROFESSOR]. You hear what she says?

WINNIE [*as before*]. I won't be hanged.

PROFESSOR [*ironic*]. Seems to have preserved a notion of social justice though!

HEAT. No law can touch her—and no man can help her. Your work.

PROFESSOR [*easy. Crisp*]. Come, Inspector Heat, none of your sentimental humbug with me. What do I care! I am a starving bomb-maker. I am a force. Why don't you try to arrest me now?

HEAT. When the time comes you won't find me afraid of the death you are supposed to carry in your pocket. But if I were to take you now, I would be no better than you.

PROFESSOR. Ah, I know. You play the game.

HEAT [*austere*]. Yes, like a man. But I will be damned if I know what your game is.

PROFESSOR. Of course you don't. You have made your name by not knowing what our game is. [*Moves towards door.*]

WINNIE [*sudden cry*]. Blood and dirt.

HEAT [*pointing finger at* PROFESSOR]. *She* has named it.

CONSTABLE [*at the door*]. A tidy lot has collected there already, sir.

HEAT [*to* PROFESSOR]. Some day maybe a crowd will tear you to pieces.

WINNIE [*a wail*]. Nothing! Nothing but blood and dirt!

PROFESSOR. Oh yes. The vile crowd. The countless multitude, unconscious, blind. . . . Well—let them!

[CONSTABLE *opens door a little. Exit* PROFESSOR, *and* CONSTABLE *shuts the door. Confused murmur of the crowd in the street.*]

STERN VOICE [*outside*]. Pass on . . . Pass along there!

HEAT [*to* CONSTABLE]. Nip out and bring a four-wheeler here as quick as you can.

CONSTABLE. Yes, sir. [*Exit. Murmur of crowd swells and dies.*]

WINNIE [*despairing cry*]. No! That must never be! [*Heat turns to* WINNIE *at the sound.*]

STERN VOICE [*outside*]. Pass along there.

[HEAT, *his hand on his chin, stands looking down profoundly at the crouching* WINNIE.]

CURTAIN